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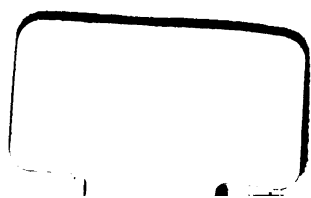
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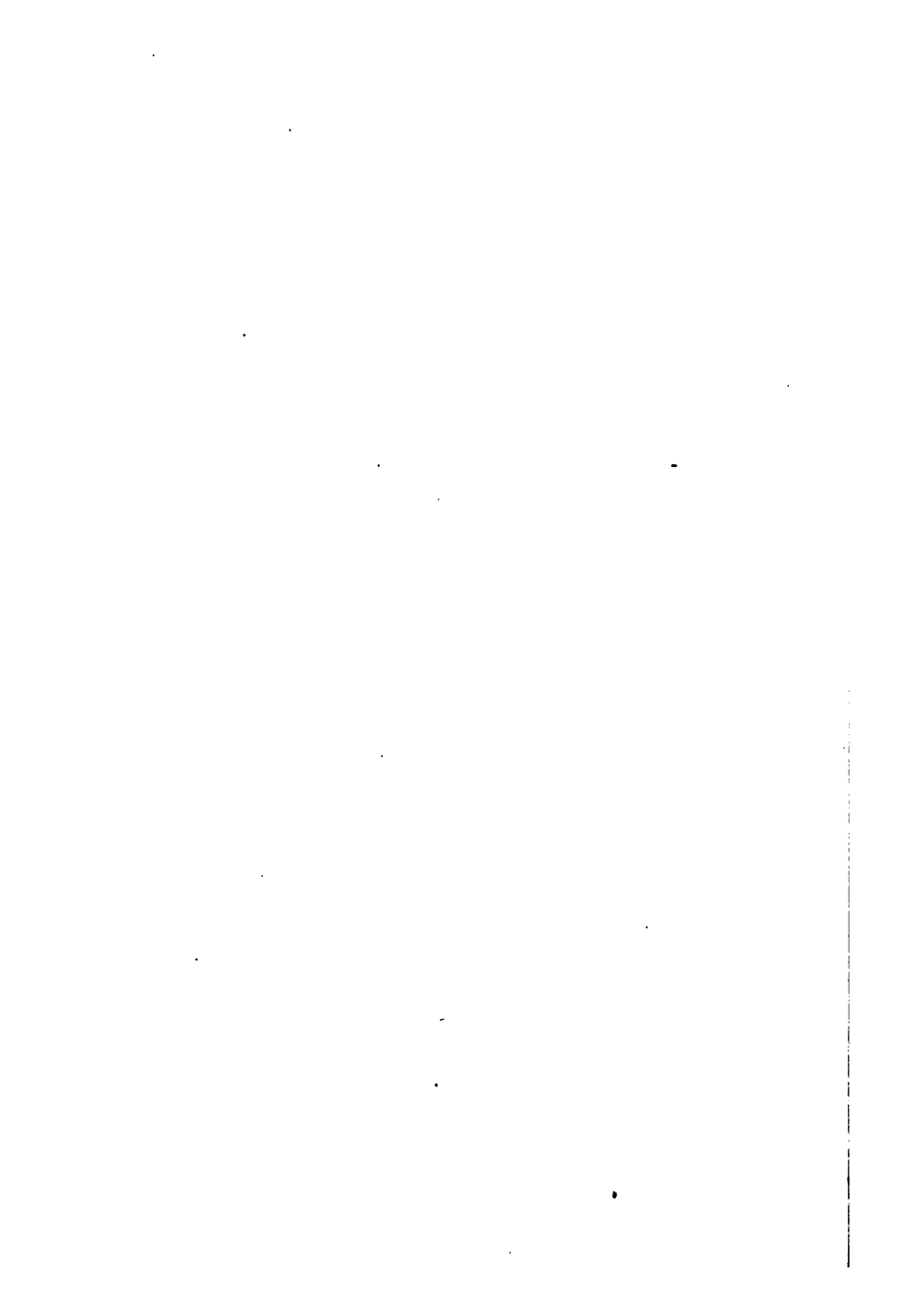
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Raymond, I.





S'ANCRER

By
IBBIE RAYMOND

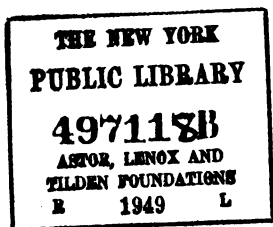


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NEW YORK

1906
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CHAPTER I

THE hills toward the west were one black mass, their contour broken by a single tree, or clump of trees, silhouetted against the afterglow of the setting sun. The sky where the sun had passed seemed like highly polished gold, reflecting the direct rays of the sun. From this centre radiated a halo far more beautiful than any mortal could conceive, which as it spread toward the south deepened in color to a rich red. A few filmy, transparent clouds had caught the sun's rays. The rest of the heavens were absolutely cloudless.

Aunt Ilda and I were alone on the west piazza of Brier Lodge one Sunday afternoon. Valleys and hills, ravines and gulleys, lay before us like a panorama. We looked down upon stretches of woodland unbroken for miles and miles.

A house or a bit of farmland on a distant hill—mere specks on the landscape though they were—reminded us that we were not entirely alone in the world. Annapolis Basin lay to the north of us, for our house, Brier Lodge, was only a few miles back of Bear River. There is a wonderful feeling of rest and happiness in the air of Nova Scotia. The natives are contented and peace-loving. Acadians, British and Indians all exemplify the theory that as our surroundings so the expres-

sion of our faces. Seeing Nature in her most beautiful aspects, breathing the tonic atmosphere, unconsciously they have become an expression of the climate. Happy in the possession of a few acres of land, "they are a people," as some one has expressed it, "earning twenty dollars and spending ten." It is Acadia, "the land of Evangeline," and the Acadians of to-day have solved the question how to live.

Like many others from the States, we appreciated to the fullest extent these divinely given qualities of this country, peace and rest.

A very small portion of our own land was under cultivation; it was just a wild spot in a wild region.

Originally on this isolated farm had been a little cottage consisting of two rooms on the ground floor, from one of which a narrow winding stairway led to a room above, which opened in turn into the only other room on the upper floor. At a later date we had built a room at the back extending the full width of the house. At the time of my story this cottage (usually spoken of as the "old" house) was being used entirely for bedrooms, another house having been built near it with living rooms and servants' quarters—known as the "new" house. This was entirely detached, the space between the houses—some ten or twelve feet in width—being virtually an uncovered hallway. On the edge of a cliff-like knoll, back of these houses, a two-room cottage had been built. This we

called Cliff Cottage, to distinguish it from the other two houses.

Our family consisted of my aunt, a frail, delicate woman; a cousin, a little girl of thirteen, and myself. My uncle had shortly before the date of my story been compelled to return to the States. Two negro women, house servants, and a white man, the son of one of the neighboring farmers, who acted as gardener and general overseer, supplemented the members of the family.

No feeling of fear had ever entered our minds. For many years I had been accustomed to roam through the woods alone, and had slept on the ground floor with doors and windows more often unlocked than locked. We were too far from the haunts of men to fear professional burglars or even sneak thieves; tramps, too, found Brier Lodge a long and dusty walk from the railroad. And the Indians of that region are notably the most peaceable of human beings; it is only a stray "Iroquois" come in disgrace from his own country to this land of the "Micmacs" that ever gives any trouble. Our very isolation seemed a protection to us, but our quiet was now to be broken.

"Did you hear Captain Caney insisting upon it that our house had been burglarized?" inquired Aunt Ilda, suddenly.

"Burglarized? What an absurdity," I answered.

"He said it was being discussed all around amongst the neighboring farmers, how an attempt had

been made to burglarize our house. He even told me who did it. Ed Case was supposed to be the burglar, he said. I told him if it were so *I* had never heard anything about it. He then said probably *you* knew of it."

"Why, Aunt Ilda, if any such thing had happened I should of course have told you immediately. That just goes to show how stories get abroad in country places," I answered.

"He also told me it was said that the women servants had been over to Bear River and some man met them as they were coming home and borrowed a dollar from them and he also borrowed a watch."

"I do not believe either one of the girls," I interrupted her, "would be such a fool as to lend a strange man money—they have too much sense. Mark my words, this story has been set afloat for some motive!"

"I could not make Captain Caney believe me," Aunt Ilda continued, "when I insisted we had had no trouble of the kind."

"Well, don't you know last night there was a sound on your porch that you first thought might be some strange person?"

"Oh, that was a dog, I am sure."

"I know you decided it was a dog, but I wondered if you had said anything about it before the servants."

"No, indeed! Not a word."

* * * * *

That night I had a most vivid dream. I thought I

was one of a party of friends who were planning to travel in Europe later in the season. One of my friends said: "You have Nixon Talcott as your gardener this summer, I hear."

"Yes," I answered.

"That is odd," she continued; "he is to be one of our party when we go abroad this fall. Did you know that he was really a duke? Well, he is, and he is going to travel under his real name—D'Ancus."

D'Ancus—I read it as I hovered on the borderland of consciousness.

Slowly I aroused myself with the feeling that something or some one was on the porch outside my front door. There was a sound as if some one were tampering with the screen door. "What was that noise?" I thought. "Could it be a stray dog?"

Sitting up in bed, I listened. There it was again! Immediately I realized that I had left my door unbolted. Quickly lighting my candle I looked around the room. All was just as when I went to bed. Still, I quickly went to the door and slid the bolt, an old-fashioned one, some six or seven inches long, with a spring arrangement, which made it not only an effort to push it in place, but a very noisy proceeding. I smiled to myself at my nervousness, decided that the story of the burglars had upset my nerves, put out my light and went back to bed. However, I could not

sleep, for the thought arose, "If it had been a stray dog, the noise of the bolt would have scared him off and I should have heard him go; but if it had been a man tampering with my wire door, he would wait to leave until he thought I was asleep—that is, unless he were drunk."

For full fifteen minutes I waited; then I heard stealthy footsteps go down the steps of the porch. Across the darkness the word "Nixon" was written like the "handwriting of old." Then I heard the sound of two or three footsteps, taken, it seemed to me, toward the "new" house.

A few moments later came a sound as if some one were on the roof of the extension, the walls of which, by the way, had separated from the main house; so that it had become necessary the season before to have braces put up to stay its downward fall. Since that time it had not moved; for "tell-tale" marks had been put in every conceivable place to give us the first intimation of a further settling. Through this crack any sound made between the two houses was perfectly audible to me, as the head of my bed was very close to the door, between my room and the extension, over which was this crack.

When I heard the footsteps on the tin roof I lit the light and waited, but no further sound came, so I put it out. I could not sleep. Hearing my aunt moving in her room, I spoke to her, and told her what I had heard,

and after looking around and discovering nothing we again went to bed.

The next morning I found on my porch distinct footprints. Some man had walked in the bank of clay which was back of the kitchen and had left almost indelible tracks behind him. It took many storms even partially to erase those marks, and the markings of the sole of the foot were as distinct as if it had been a plaster cast. So it had not been a case of nerves, but reality!

CHAPTER II

"ALYS, why don't you speak to Nixon about the footprints on your steps?" It was breakfast time and we were on our way to the dining-room when my aunt suggested telling Nixon. Instinctively I felt it was not wise; yet could give no valid reason for not telling him, as he was our protector for the time being.

"You had better tell him now," urged my aunt; "he is just coming up from the barn." I went to meet him and told him of my night's experience.

"Yes, they are certainly footprints," he said; "and whoever it was was in his bare feet. Do you see how he stepped from the ground to the second step?" he continued, suiting the action to the words.

"Yes," I answered. "One can easily follow his every movement. He has rested on that step, no doubt to listen. The prints of both feet are there."

Nixon placed his foot in each print until he reached the door. "You see this is a staple and hook," he remarked, "and he thought by pressing the door upwards it would be quite easy to undo it"—following the words with the suggested action. The sound was that which I had heard the night previous! Turning, he followed the course of the prowler, showing just how he had descended.

Then I told him of the story I had heard the day before. "I guess it *was* Ed Case who was here last night!" he said—his face becoming set. "He is a negro that is always found where he does not belong. He is no good, anyway."

"I never heard of him before yesterday, but everybody seems to have the same opinion of him. Why don't they lock him up?" I asked. "I should think they could have caught him before this."

Nixon did not answer. I could not see his face; the large straw hat he wore fully covered it.

"I am going to take an impression of these marks for future use," I continued, "and I am going to ferret this mystery out or know the reason why."

Nixon was looking down intently as I spoke. "Why is he looking so steadily at that step when there are no marks there?" I queried of myself.

Suddenly an odd idea presented itself. "His—shoe—would—just—fit—such—a—footprint!" He seemed to feel my thought, for he quickly moved his feet and glanced up, his blue eyes troubled beyond expression and great drops of perspiration standing on his forehead. I looked at him intently. "Was *he* the one," I thought, "who while presumably our protector was attempting to molest two defenceless women?"

All at once he pulled himself together and started to track the footprints away from the porch.

"It is unnecessary to look in that direction," I said quietly, as he started to look in the opposite direction from that in which I believe the men of the night before had gone. "The footprints would be instantly lost over there."

"That is so," he answered. "I don't believe we could trace them, they would so soon be lost. It must have been some one passing through the place—probably drunk."

"Well," I said, "it was some one who knew that I slept with the inner door unlocked, even though it was closed to, and who counted on opening the screen door without awakening me. I wonder if he thought I slept with the door unlocked and not armed. I am not fool enough for that"—mentally conjuring up the jack-knife which had always been my protector, as I returned to the dining-room.

Later I verified my intuition on the subject of the footprints, by finding the same prints on the west piazza, which ran at the side of the living-room and dining-room. The man, whoever he was, had gone to the door leading to the servants' stairway, which went up between these two rooms.

I went to my aunt and told her I was extremely sorry to say it, but that I feared our overseer and guardian, as it were, could not be trusted, and believed that he was the man who had attempted to enter the house the previous night. It would be wording it

mildly to say she was indignant. He, the grandson of a well-to-do farmer, a respected citizen, who had owned acres upon acres of ground in the vicinity. I must be on the verge of nervous prostration even to think of such a thing.

"What motive could he have?" she asked.

"I cannot imagine," I answered.

"If it were theft," she remarked, "he has free access to the whole house, knows where everything is and could take what he desired in broad daylight without suspicion ever attaching itself to him."

"I know all that, Aunt Ilda, but still I feel that I am right. At any rate, whoever it is, I want to find your revolver; you have one somewhere, I know."

"Yes; I have one that belonged to your uncle. It is on the top of my wardrobe, I think."

"Well, I want it, if I may have it."

"Certainly you may, though it has not been used or looked after for years."

"I am going to take it out in the kitchen and show them there is such a thing as a revolver in the house. It will do no harm to let the servants think we are armed."

"I cannot see what makes you suspect Nixon," my aunt repeated. "It is so perfectly absurd."

"Aunt Ilda," I answered, "when you think of it his past life does not make it so very improbable, after all. You know he ran away with another man's wife a few

years ago, and when they had spent all the money they took out of the till of her husband's store she returned to her husband."

"Yes, I know that, but Nixon was more sinned against than sinning then; that woman was ten years older than he was, and no doubt she was to blame for the whole thing."

"That is the way we all felt at the time, and we have given him the benefit of the doubt; still, you know you have said yourself that you would never have hired him had you been asked for advice on the subject. I have certainly tried my utmost," I continued, "to make his life with us as pleasant as possible, feeling that to one who should have had such a different career, it was doubly hard to be so lowered in the scale of life as to be compelled to do a menial's work."

It was of no avail to continue the argument. I was terribly distressed by my aunt's attitude toward the situation. It increased the complications a thousandfold.

By Cheiro's method of reading palmistry, a time was coming in my life when I should be in the gravest of dangers, and only by presence of mind and self-control could I avert murder or worse than murder. So great was the danger my brain would nearly give way. Was this the man I had to fear, and was this the place, the most restful and dearest of all places to me in the world, to be the scene of the greatest ordeal of my life?

* * * * *

Picture to yourself an old-time negress, pop-eyed, also slightly wall-eyed, with little pigtails standing out at right angles all over her head; black as the ace of spades, rather short and shapeless; at the full of the moon hilarious, singing wild camp-meeting hymns, but as the moon waned morose, bad tempered and using language of a sort ill-befitting polite society. This was our cook—Martha. The housemaid, Rose, though a negress, had so much white blood in her veins that every negro trait had been stifled, every instinct, we believed, was that of a well-educated white woman. She was tall, well formed and graceful, with brown hair and hazel eyes. Ever merry and good natured, she would snap her fingers to simulate a castanet, and sing softly, swaying her body in perfect time with her song. The two women were busy at their work in the kitchen as I entered, revolver in hand. Poor me, I was more afraid of the revolver than I was of the burglar. I tried my best to handle it in some such manner as I had seen men on the stage or in pictures do.

The girls eyed me and then the revolver, stopping their work and wondering, I suppose, if I had lost my mind. I burst out laughing. "Don't be afraid, girls; I am not going to use this now, but I will use it if there is any more trouble at night. I want to ask you about a story that is floating around the neighborhood."

"What about, Miss Alys," interrupted Rose, "a burglar?"

"You have heard the story then?" I answered.

"Yes; Joe Caney told Nixon the other night, but asked him not to say anything about it," she replied.

"Why, Miss Alys," broke in Martha, "we haven't been to Bear River but once this summer."

"I know that, Martha," I remarked; "and, besides, I don't deem you girls such fools as the story would make one think you were."

"We doan have no watches anyhow, Miss Alys," continued Martha.

"I have never seen either of you with one," I answered.

I looked wistfully at Rose. I should have liked to have enlisted the help of this woman in trying to find out if Nixon had been the one to attempt an entrance to my room; however, some instinct kept me from telling her my suspicions.

"Well, girls, I want you to take the big dinner bell up to your room to-night, and if you hear any strange sounds ring the bell; then you will see me coming with my revolver," I continued; "it is no toy thing, but a man's revolver. I consider myself a pretty straight shot and only hope I may have an opportunity to try my aim on whoever is wandering around here."

CHAPTER III

ON Tuesday, the next day, we compared notes. I had again heard some one trying to master the catch on my screen door. I had also heard the door leading to the dining-room open and shut and a sound as if some one was on the roof. During the night Rose had heard some one shaking the latch of the door leading to their stairway; thought at first it was Nixon, but then remembered he had retired about the time she and the cook went to bed. The next morning she asked him if he had gone out during the night. He said, "No." She found on coming downstairs that some one had come to their door after the shower, for distinct footprints were on the piazza and they led straight to their stair door.

"Alys, will you help Nixon pack some fruit? I want to send it to town!" called Aunt Ilda, as we were talking.

"Certainly I will," I answered, going to the porch between the houses.

While selecting and packing the fruit, in the full glare of a summer day, I forgot all about the prowler and my suspicion of the man who was working beside me. His manner was all it should be, not servile, yet

thoroughly polite; we had always treated him differently from a servant.

The fruit packed, it was then to be covered and marked; old feed bags were to be used in lieu of missing slat covers.

Nixon sat on the step of the little covered porch that led to the opening between the houses; I was on a low chair just back of him, waiting for him to finish ripping the bags.

We had been chatting in a desultory way all during our work; the bees boring under the bench near us and buzzing around our ears made a sleepy sort of feeling come over me. I was comfortable in my easy chair, waiting for him to finish. I was watching him, too, for the artist in me always revelled in the coloring of this man. His hair and a slight moustache were of a black that seemed to catch so many different rays of light that it was always an interesting thought, "What colors would I use if I were painting him?"

Modelling being my life's work, form was of course of paramount interest to me. The long line of the throat as it melts into the shoulder is ever the most beautiful part of the human anatomy to me. A dark loose shirt of a blue almost black and open at the neck disclosed this line to perfection and made a fitting background for the exquisite glow of his skin. The sun had not tanned and roughened it, as is generally his custom with those exposed continually to his rays, but

had made it a rich tone that never before had I seen. Nature had been very lavish to this man, and had meted out to him more than his share of good looks. Clear cut features of absolutely perfect proportions were combined with this exquisite skin and eyes of Heaven's own blue.

"What would I not give to paint or model him?" I was thinking.

"This is a longer piece of work than I thought it would be," broke in Nixon. That was so—there was the sun peering over the sides of the roof. What had I been thinking of—sitting here like this!

"What time is it, Nixon?" I asked.

Taking out his watch, he answered, "It's five minutes past twelve, Miss Alys."

"For Heaven's sake, Nixon, give me that bag; you have just ten minutes to harness and for us to finish covering these baskets. I will get my jack-knife and rip the covering while you bring the horse up to the house."

A self-satisfied expression crossed his face. Angry! I was angry through and through with myself to be caught napping in such a way. He had taken fully a half hour to rip two inches of the covering, and inside of three minutes he did the remainder of the ripping. So he had simply fooled me into sitting beside him; and I apparently had enjoyed it, for I had not been conscious of the lapse of time.

That night I heard the prowler come to my door, then there was a quick flash of light—ah! he was working by the aid of an electric bulb.

The wood of the screen door had warped, which had made a space between it and the jamb of the doorway; too small we had thought to allow any one to open the door from the outside. But with some new tool the prowler had secured he raised the hook out of the staple and put it back easily in place. Then without trying to cover the sound of his footsteps, he deliberately went down, as if it were broad daylight and he had a perfect right to be there. He was very confident of success. I knew I might expect developments the next night.

When morning came I was not surprised to see a particularly bold expression in Nixon's eyes. He had a way of looking at you that made you turn your eyes away from his, and more than once I had made some excuse to keep from looking at him when forced to give him orders about his work.

I was in the far cellar that evening making preparations for supper, when I heard Nixon coming down the stairs. He came directly toward me, placing himself across the only doorway in such a way that I felt I was a prisoner.

"I want to go home this evening, Miss Alys," he said. I was not surprised; this was what I had expected. I had felt confident all day this would be part of his plan.

"Very well, Nixon, I have no objection," I answered.

"Are you not afraid of the prowler?" he asked.

"Not at all," was my answer. "I think I am perfectly capable of coping with him."

"Well, he is aimless in his movements, that's a fact. He isn't a professional burglar, that's plain to be seen." His voice had lowered—there was a change in it—it was as if he were trying to stay the fears of a child. "He doesn't go about it as if he really knew what he was about."

Indignant as I felt, I hardly knew what to say.

"I suppose you will be home some time to-night?" I asked quietly, moving rather haughtily toward the door. My moral strength made him step back as he answered with a little catch in his breath, "Oh, yes, of course."

CHAPTER IV

I LOOKED from one to the other of our little family as we sat at the supper table and thought how unutterably at the mercy of any one we were—out in this wildest of wild woods—parts of which from one year's end to the other no foot ever traversed. There was no human being to come to our aid no matter how loudly we might call.

"Was that lightning, Aunt Ilda?" I asked, as a light flashed across the darkness of the night.

"It is a gorgeous night," she replied; "I did not notice any sign of a thunder shower."

"There it is again," I remarked.

Just then we heard a wild laugh from the direction of the kitchen. Hastily rising from the table I went to the door. "What in the world is the matter?" I asked.

Martha lay prone across the kitchen table convulsed with laughter as she described the scene Nixon had pictured to the girls when Martha would ring the big dinner bell and I should come out with the revolver and *be afraid to shoot it off!*

"It remains to be seen if I shall be afraid," I said a little stiffly.

This scene fairly haunted me as I prepared for bed that night. So the servants had been made to feel that

it was useless to call on me for assistance and had been guyed into quietude.

To keep awake, yet to be compelled to lie down as if I were asleep, seemed beyond the power of endurance; still, my aunt must not be worried and should she become aware of the many wakeful nights I had had, it might be a serious matter for her in her present physical condition. Having been on guard for three nights with no opportunity to sleep in the daytime, I was completely worn out.

I prayed earnestly for strength to keep awake! But God has limited His own power. He has given us a physical nature with physical laws, and He abides by those laws, just as we should. He never breaks His own laws.

I believe God meant us to help ourselves to the fullest extent of our abilities. We should use all our faculties, all our strength, mental, moral and physical, to attain the ends we believe to be the best, and then we must leave the final result in God's hands without worry or lack of reliance in His power to guide and guard us.

Years of study of psychology on the lines set forth by Dr. Hudson had made me fully aware of the forceful nature of his theories as to suggestion. I recognized both our power to influence others and our power over ourselves.

Hudson tells us that "there is nothing to differentiate hypnotic sleep from natural sleep." We all

know the power suggestion has over a person in a hypnotic sleep and we shall find that at no time or place is suggestion so powerful as when we are passing from under the control of our own objective mind. If we then suggest some line of thought or action to ourselves or to some other entity whose objective senses are in abeyance, the results far surpass ready belief. Counter suggestions to the wave or current of our thought are less likely to occur under these circumstances.

Prentice Mulford said "thought is force," which is truer at such a time than at any other.

In this case I knew a strong or violent auto-suggestion was at work which would entirely counteract the effect of any suggestion from me. For no one can be forced to do an act that is diametrically opposite to his nature because the auto-suggestion becomes too strong. In other words, the soul or entity has been educated or moulded by ones own objective reasoning, on the one hand to be antagonistic to crime, and on the other to be favorable to it.

As I lay down I commanded the ego within me, with the whole power of my objective mind—"Be on guard—be alert to all sounds that can be connected with the prowler—bring to the plane of objective cognizance all that is necessary for preservation from threatened danger."

* * * * *

The sounds early began to demonstrate that the

prowler felt fully assured that no one could hear him. He knew full well my aunt was somewhat deaf; she always slept on her "well ear"—as she termed it—which made her oblivious to all sounds around her. He also knew my young cousin slept, as most children do, through anything and everything.

The room being absolutely dark, when a flash of light shot through the slats of the shutter I knew it came from the electric bulb. I heard the catch being undone and the screen door open. At the same time I heard again the same sound on the roof. *He* had an accomplice to-night!

I sat up quietly in bed. "What could I do?" I wondered.

It was as if I could read the man's intentions before he executed them. One man was going to come in the upper windows—the other was at my door.

I had not considered that there was much danger in the windows upstairs, as they had wire netting tacked over them. Still, as there was no lock on the door of the little stairway leading from my room to the room above, I had put a large water ewer full of water on the top step on my side of the door, thinking if I did fall asleep and did not hear any one get in from above no person could enter my room without knocking the pitcher down the steps against various things, thus arousing the whole household.

Sitting on the side of the bed I waited. Can you

realize the weirdness of it all—waiting—hearing the regular ticking of the clock—and wondering what each second would bring? Knowing the cold, calculating nature that would wait fifteen minutes, or even a half hour, to take a few more steps; yes—and this was the horror of feeling myself nodding with sleep while I waited to hear what was coming.

I heard the wire taken off the tacks—later the window opened; by this time I had crept softly to the door between my room and my aunt's. I should be out of the range, at least, of their flashing a blinding light in my eyes. Nixon knew my eyes were weak in a strong light. From a quick glance he had given me that very morning when reflected sunlight had made me wince with pain, I was convinced he would use some such method of procedure, if possible.

Grasping my apology for a revolver in both hands to steady it, with a bottle of camphor in readiness to throw the contents in their eyes if my revolver refused to act, I stood on guard.

Stealthily the footsteps crept across the upper floor, then stopped; the prowler was listening, I suppose, to see if any one moved. Finally some one came down the stairway, and the footsteps were those of a negro. A thin streak of light shot across my room—the door was being opened.

“Why did he hesitate?” I queried of myself. “Oh! I wonder if he thinks I am behind the door?”

Suddenly I realized that a person standing behind that door would have every advantage, if fully armed. It meant shooting at only a foot's distance with time to aim. The negro waited—so did I—and so did the man on the piazza. I scarcely breathed, for if the man outside ever found that I was *not behind* the door, then all was over, and murder was the lesser evil to be feared.

How long the men waited, I know not—it seemed to me I lived years in those minutes. At last the man on the porch tried to open the front door, which, of course, was bolted. Was I a fool to trust to an ordinary hook on a screen door after all that had happened? Was the man demented to think I had never heard any sounds since that first night? I had not spoken of them to him, so I presume he took it for granted I slept more soundly than I thought. Balked again!

The man on the stairway went upstairs, opened one of the front windows, and indignantly called out something to his accomplice. The voice on the porch seemed to tell the negro he could not open the door. I could not hear what was said, but by the tones of their voices I could readily understand their conversation. Each wanted the other to take the momentous step!

The negro returned to his position on the stairway. A narrow streak of moonlight shot across my room;

I knew the man outside had again tried the door, but again he hesitated. They were such cowards, they feared to force an entrance. I could not help a sneer crossing my lips. *He* could be cold, deliberate, persevering in his moves, but he was a despicable coward at heart.

Aunt Ilda awoke. I could tell it by her breathing and the way she moved in bed. If she should light the candle, all was over; she would see me standing not six feet away from her, and the men would know I was not behind the stair door. I prayed earnestly that she might not make a light.

I kept myself as motionless and as breathless as possible. A great desire to cough came over me. I prayed for strength and help. My prayers were answered. Aunt Ilda turned over and soon was breathing regularly. She had gone to sleep.

I stood so long on guard that I ached in every bone of my body; never for a second could I relax. I recalled as I stood there the many looks Nixon had given me—pitying they seemed, as if I were already in his power. All at once I realized his motive, kidnapping for a ransom!

D'Ancus was the way I had understood the word of my dream on Sunday night, but it should have been, perhaps, S'Ancrer. Had the ego been trying to tell me? S'Ancrer—to get a footing? Though there was little to steal in our wild summer home, there was a good

sized check-book that could be drawn upon if necessary.

A rooster crowed. Think for a moment what that sound meant. Light and freedom from the awful suspense. The steps went up the stairs—the negro, too, had heard the cock crow and knew dawn was coming; the window shut. Thank God! The suspense was over for that night. There were a dozen pure white hairs hid among the blond ones around my forehead when daylight came—the result of a night's torture.

CHAPTER V

As soon as I heard my aunt stirring in her room I went in and told her of my night's experience. "Something must be done, Aunt Ilda," I said to her. "I have reached the end of my power of endurance."

What was my horror to find she did not believe a word of my story, but thought I was on the verge of nervous prostration and was not accountable for what I said—in fact, she believed it was all an hallucination. Here was a phase of the affair that made it doubly appalling. I could not leave her and my young cousin alone—I owed this aunt a daughter's devotion and care. She suggested my going to Digby and asking a cousin who was visiting friends to come out and stay with us. Lucille Nelson was noted for being a cool-headed, business-like woman, the opposite type from myself, who was considered imaginative and dreamy. I suppose my aunt thought Lucille's companionship would quiet my nerves.

I hurriedly dressed and told Nixon to bring the horse up to the house, I was going to town by the next train.

Now came a lonely drive of several miles with the man I feared. Not a single house were we to pass until we reached the station, and the chances were that

we should not meet a single person or wagon on our way there. As Nixon went down the driveway to the barn, I saw the outline of a revolver in his right hip pocket. When we drove away he had his coat on, so I could not see then where his revolver was, but I knew he was perfectly well aware that mine was on my lap, although he could not see it. I sat directly behind him, watching every movement, talking as if nothing were the matter, and never mentioning my experience of the previous night. I was determined that if ever his hand reached for his side pocket, I would put the muzzle of my revolver to his neck, and it would not be my fault if I did not blow his brains out. However, I could not help thinking once again as I watched him so intently how wonderfully lavish Dame Nature had been toward him; with her paints and her chisel she had made a perfect exterior.

After driving a couple of miles we neared a wood belonging to his father. At one time their house had stood quite close to the roadside, but a fire occurred while they and some of their neighbors were revelling, and the house had burnt to the ground. Now the family lived in a little cabin farther away from the road. It was here that Nixon was born; here he knew every inch of ground, and here was the danger point, I felt!

There was a fork in the road at this point; one road led to Digby, the other, which I was to take, went on to ,

Smith's Cove. Nixon turned and looked intently as if seeing something unusual down the road to Digby; and my first impulse was to follow his eyes and see what he was looking at. Something said to me, "No—Alys, watch out."

"It bothers me to twist my neck to look backward," I said in a cold, deliberate tone, answering his motion. "Nixon, hurry Billy, I know I am going to miss that train," I continued. There was a curious indecision in his manner.

I watched him still more closely—we were now passing through the stretch of woodland. Farther on we would cross the railroad track, then after a few minutes I should be safe.

As we neared the track I noticed one of a gang of workmen (Carter, a negro) look from Nixon to myself, while a broad grin passed over his face. Instinctively I felt that he was Nixon's accomplice. Carter was a malicious, deviltry-loving negro who had been discharged from our employ after having been with us only a few weeks. He used to chase the other servants with the little green grass snakes that are so common in this country, and even put them down their backs to frighten them. He seemed to love to see anything suffer, but he had not brains enough to think or plan deeply. Carter could only be a tool.

So much was I engrossed by these thoughts that I was almost caught unawares. I turned suddenly to

find Nixon's hand was moving quietly toward his right hip.

"It hurts my neck to look backward," I remarked a second time, keeping perfect control of my voice. "Nixon, I intend catching this train. As I told you, we did not have overmuch time when we left the house, and Billy has been going at a snail's pace."

He hesitated—the coward in him came uppermost—the Rubicon was passed once again; a moment more and the houses near the station were in sight.

The shrill whistle, echoed and re-echoed by the hills, announced the coming train—I was just in time to catch it.

* * * * *

A breeze was ruffling the water of the Basin, causing it to assume a prismatic appearance. What other water changes its hue from a deep violet to a green, then to a blue, as the wind kisses its surface and passes on to the hills beyond?

As I looked at it this morning it seemed a huge opal, its setting the green hills veiled by a thin blue haze. This setting was broken in only one place, Digby Gut—the common appellation for the Gap. It is a most appropriate name, if not euphonious, for it is the very vitals of Digby—this opening to the bay of Fundy that makes her a seaport town and gives her a harbor as beautiful and safe as there is to be found along the coast.

In the Joggin the weirs were showing their full height and the gulls were busily engaged in eating a breakfast of fishes stranded by the out-going tide. As we crossed the bridge over the Joggin, the Gap was in full view, with Beaman's Mountain standing guard on one side and North Mountain on the other. The white sails of pleasure craft and fishing boats added the touch of white needed to perfect the color scheme. A few canoes lent their quota to the picturesqueness of the scene.

When I reached the town I found the cartridges in my revolver were covered with verdigris, and would never have exploded; besides, I did not know there was such a thing as half cock to a revolver, and instead of my revolver being cocked and ready to shoot, it was all this time on the half cock and I would not have known enough to have pulled the trigger further back.

In a few hours I returned with my cousin Lucille. She had purchased a revolver and I had had mine oiled and generally put in good condition. We now understood their mechanism, and having had lessons in handling them, were better able to protect ourselves. That night the usual visit to my door took place and an attempt to open the inner door, also to slide the bolt. We heard the usual muffled sound on the roof, and I thought a trial was made of one of the upper windows, which we had carefully nailed up. However,

I had a couple of hours' sleep, Lucille keeping watch for me, though I slept with my revolver cocked.

In the morning we sent Nixon on an errand, and while he was away examined his bedroom, to see if we could find anything incriminating there. A feeling of contempt was aroused within us at the manner in which he had knotted and tied a rope in order to prevent any one forcing an entrance to his room.

We were rummaging through an old trunk which belonged to the family, when Lucille asked, "Is there any good keeping this old overcoat?"

"It is only half of one, apparently," I answered.

"Let us throw it away—it is foolish to keep such trash," continued Lucille.

"It's woolly and perhaps the folks expect to make some use of it; here is the other half," I continued, as I dove further into the trunk; "it has been cut exactly down the middle, the sleeves taken out—funny isn't it—wonder what on earth they have intended doing with it?"

"If I had my way I would throw it away with the rest of this trash," repeated Lucille.

Several days after I wished we had!

That afternoon I overheard a conversation between my aunt and Nixon, who were in the dining-room. I was in the next room, but neither of them knew it.

"You must get Captain Caney to come over and fix

the outer door, Nixon. I cannot even close it the last few days, much less lock it," said Aunt Ilda.

"Very well, I will," he answered.

"Does it need planing, do you suppose?" she asked.

"No," he replied.

"Alys said she thought it was best not to plane it, for the weather is now so dry, it must necessarily shrink back in place. It must be fixed," she said, "for with this nonsense about prowlers Rose and Martha will be afraid to sleep over here if they know this door cannot even be shut."

"I will tell Captain Caney," Nixon replied. "He is coming over in a day or two. I guess if the upper screws are unscrewed and screwed up again, it will hang all right."

When they had both gone away I went to the door and examined it. The upper screws had been loosened! No wonder it would not shut! We had examined that door over and over again. The weather had been remarkably dry and we could not tell why the door had become so swollen that it would not come anywhere near closing.

It took only a moment to secure a screw-driver and to tighten the screws; the door could now be closed and locked. Nixon was bright enough to think of methods to bring about his desired purpose, but always by some little inadvertent remark or look made plain his intended action.

CHAPTER VI

WHILE at supper that evening we noticed a faint light as if from the electric bulb. At first we thought it distant lightning. The night was glorious; the moon at its full, paling the stars into nothingness and lending a halo of glory to everything. How peaceful a scene! The pine trees in their stateliness silhouetted against the sky—sentinels, perhaps, guarding us.

"A beautiful setting for a scene in a melodrama, isn't it?" Lucille asked of me, as she threw her arm around me.

"It makes me so all-fired mad to think we are enacting a 'two for a cent' play; I wish he would go on the stage and be done with it," I remarked. "Here we are, revolver in hand, as if each shadow held a lurking figure, and not daring to let our thoughts stray to any other subject for fear we shall be caught napping."

"Be careful," said Lucille; "Beth will hear you. We do not want her to know anything of this."

"Beth is one of the worst features of this affair, Lucille," was my answer. "For a girl of her age to be frightened now means so much for her whole life. If I could only send her home to her mother I should do so; but I have no excuse to make to her, and she is dreading the closing of the farm and her return to

city life. This is home to her, for all her holidays have been spent here. It is not only the danger to myself, but, Lucille, it is the responsibility of the others that worries me, and I feel guilty in bringing you into it, too, dear."

"Don't worry about me," Lucille replied; "I am only anxious to get a shot at this fellow and try my new revolver—thirteen dollars were spent on it, you know. I must get *some* use out of it."

As we walked up and down the long west piazza, we made our plans for the night. We decided to undress in our respective rooms, but after the lights were all out I was to go upstairs to Lucille's room and we were to watch from there, as we had then two windows to the north and two to the south at our command. In the house where the sleeping rooms were, there were no windows toward the west or east, which gave the intruder an opportunity to dodge around the corner to safety.

We carefully nailed three of the upper windows, leaving one of the front windows wide open. I drew a large armchair to this window and turned its back nearly facing it.

While we were undressing we heard a stone fall as if it had been thrown up in the air and had come down through the leaves of the trees; you could have counted fifteen or twenty before another stone fell; so we were to have trouble early to-night!

Palmistry's teachings came to my mind. The calmness and courage I had felt in the lessons it had taught made me decide to try and imbue Lucille with the same confidence. I knew my aunt's estimate of our two characters was made from lack of belief in or understanding of a psychic's organization. She could not tolerate any discussion or reasonings on this or kindred subjects. Her opinions regarding them were those entertained a quarter of a century ago and prior to that.

I took my book on palmistry then and there upstairs to Lucille and asked her to read a certain passage.

"What do you mean by this?" she asked.

"You see a square on my head line," I answered; "well, a square there means preservation by the person's own courage and presence of mind from threatened violence. So great will be my danger," I continued, "that my brain will almost give way, but I shall conquer in the end."

Quickly holding out her hand she said, "Tell me am I, too, going to come out of this whole and alive?"

I caught my breath—"I cannot see by this light, dear," I answered. I dared not look, for supposing she did get harmed and all for me? It had not entered my head before that they might molest her.

"Just remember, Lucille," I continued, "no matter what happens, it is coming out all right in the end."

"But you do not tell me what may happen to me," she said. "You have a very firm faith in palmistry, Alys."

"Yes, a strong one, perhaps," I answered. "Strong like my faith in my Maker, and in reality part and parcel of my religious views. I believe our hands are pages from the Book of Life, 'written not with ink,' but with some fluid or living fire known, as the electrical current is, only by its effects. Each person carries with him, primarily, a record of his inherited traits and tendencies. As he resists or yields to temptation, so upon the hand is it written."

"God 'hath determined the times appointed, and the bounds of their habitation.' And the momentous things of our life—the character-forming events are written on our hands. Life in this world is a school to train the ego or subjective entity for the life beyond."

"Yes—He determined all when He first made the world. He knew what would evolve and what course evolution would take. As a moneron separates itself into sections, each having its own individual existence, so God, 'the Creative Energy,' has given each of us a part of Himself—a soul. We are all atoms, yet each atom has a part to perform and the aggregate forms the world. It is not strange He should have known what success or failure we—each atom—shall make of our life before we have had a conscious existence. for

He knows our inherited traits—our environments—the influences brought to bear upon us, consequently the result.

“Are these lines, marks, formations mere haphazard, meaningless, erratic happenings of nature? Or, as ‘Our bodies are the tabernacles of the Holy Spirit,’ are they the result of God’s foreknowledge of all things written by Him as a record, and also warning signs of our weaknesses shown to us for our own benefit? If we only consider them in that light and not as something supernatural or pertaining to the lower regions, or merely as creases formed by the movement of the muscles, as physicians so often tell you, and the next moment want you to read their palms. “However, Lucille, I know you and I do not think alike on these subjects. I’ll go down and put out my light and then will slip upstairs very shortly.”

We had just settled ourselves in bed when I noticed a peculiar light in the next room. The back, or south, windows of both rooms had dark green shades, pulled down to exclude the moonlight as well as to give us a dark background for moving around our room and yet permit us to see as much as possible of what was going on in front of the house.

“Look at the way the light is changing in the next room,” I whispered. “They are working with a dark lantern to-night.”

Slowly the light changed in our room now, the rays

coming from the north window gradually increasing in intensity.

"What are you going to do?" Lucille asked as I crept out of bed.

"I am going to the window to watch."

I slid into the chair by the window, keeping well in its shadow with my revolver cocked, ready for action. Lucille also crept out of bed and stood back of me.

"Lucille," I whispered, "remember one thing, it is my right to shoot first. I feel confident they will attempt to enter this window. I want you to promise me you will let me have two shots, and you are not to shoot until after the second shot, for if we shoot at random one or the other of us will get hurt. Besides, our aim will not be true—sh—I hear the sound of a wheelbarrow."

Later there was a sound at the door of my room just below us—the creaking of the screen door—then sawing commenced.

"What under the sun are they doing now?" I whispered.

"Goodness knows—I hear them at Beth's window," whispered Lucille excitedly. "I know they will come in there."

"Keep quiet," I answered; "that is only a blind, Lucille."

"But are you going to let them get in downstairs?" she argued.

"Hush! They will hear you."

Again there was the sawing sound, and at the same time a noise at the rear of the house.

"We ought to wake up Aunt Ilda," Lucille insisted.

"Well, all right," I answered, "perhaps it is best, but I do not move from here."

"Won't you come downstairs?" she asked.

"No, I will not—these sounds are made to distract our attention. I remain right here—sh—the light is getting stronger."

"I am going down to tell Aunt Ilda."

"Oh, if Lucille would only keep still!" I thought.

"Very well," was my answer.

While she was away I heard a sound—what was it? A ladder. Yes, exactly as I expected! They were quietly sliding it along the house into position. I listened intently; a bare foot was placed on the first rung of the ladder; then, on the second, I saw the shadow of a man in the open between the trees. Why I did not shoot then, I cannot answer; except the ego seemed to warn me against doing it. Perhaps they thought I would shoot at the shadow, thinking it to be a man in reality, but I felt the lantern was held in such a way by one of the men as to cast his shadow in plain view of the window, and while I shot at that the man on the ladder would have covered me with his revolver.

Lucille came up the stairs followed by Aunt Ilda. It seemed to me they made as much noise as possible.

"Please be quiet," I said in a low tone; "the men have put a ladder against the house and one of the men is on it."

"You are very much mistaken," Aunt Ilda replied. "I looked out of my window and saw nothing there."

"Did you open your shutter?" I inquired.

"No, that was not necessary; I could see the ground around the house, anyway," she answered.

I knew these shutters were wooden ones and had stationary slats, and very little could be seen unless she had opened them and leaned well out of the window. We, with the window entirely out—for it was not much larger in its entirety than half a good sized window would be—could not see the ground below, because the window was covered with a wire netting tacked on from the outside.

Aunt Ilda and Lucille were standing in full view of any one who might be lurking in front of the house. The light of the lantern was training at this time full upon our room. I felt myself losing my nerve. I was confident that I would not be shot, and that murder would not be committed, unless they were brought to bay; still Aunt Ilda's danger unnerved me.

"Please go down, Aunt Ilda; it makes me nervous having you here. Stay in my room, where you are in touch with us, and with Beth," I said.

"I shall have you both ill with pneumonia," she replied. "I wish you would be sensible and get in bed."

"I am going to remain here awhile, Aunt Ilda, but I cannot have you stand where a shot might harm you, and, besides, I know you will be seriously ill if you catch cold. Please be kind and go downstairs and get in my bed."

She went to the bed, took a blanket and wrapped me in it as if I were a mummy. I could not have even arisen from the chair without some moments' preparation, much less warded off an intruder. I kept it on until she had gone downstairs and all was quiet in the room below, then I threw aside the blanket and we settled down to watch once again.

Time rolled on. The lantern had been turned away from our room and it shone queerly on the trees, making a square frame of dark around the light. My head nodded. Lucille coughed to rouse me. Two hours' sleep in six days! Even when I fully expected a head to raise itself at any second above the ledge of the window, and knew if he covered me with his revolver first—all was lost—still I nodded.

"O God," I cried, "help me to keep awake!"

Not only myself but others depended on my power of endurance.

All was quiet for a time. In the stillness of the night sounds that are inaudible to the ears in the daytime are distinct then. Whether it was the effect of this stillness, or an increased power of hearing from the ego's warning, I could hear even such a faint sound

as the bare foot again placed on the rung of the ladder. Yet another step.

"Lucille, he is coming," I whispered; a cough and scraping of her chair over the bare floor was the consequence.

"For Heaven's sake keep quiet, Lucille, or they will never come," I exclaimed.

"Well, I for one do not want them to come; if I can keep them from coming I will," she answered very decidedly.

"But I want to shoot the top of his head off," I whispered.

That was the truth. I had reached the point where I had but one thought. I wanted to shoot him, I wanted a cool, deliberate aim that meant death to him. I did not want to murder him in the usual acceptance of that word. It must be in self-defence, for I had not lost the control of my real self.

"I think it would be a great deal better to go downstairs and be with Aunt Ilda and Beth. I heard them again at Aunt Ilda's door," Lucille said.

"My dear, you can go down if you want to; they are trying to get us downstairs. There is no way of our locking the stair door, and I have command of them here. If they once get in we are conquered. I am going to sit right here until daylight."

A little later there was a crash! Consternation reigned! We looked at each other—what to do?

"They have gotten in downstairs—I told you so," said Lucille. "What shall we do? Shall I shoot to awaken her?"

I hesitated. The chance for the shot I had so hoped to get, when it would be a shot to kill, was over for this night, I felt sure. What good was it simply to scare them off for that night? There was the next night, and the next, and so on. I could not endure many more; my brain would give way. Oh, if they had only kept quiet and let them come up the ladder! I could have cried.

"Shall I shoot? I heard Aunt Ilda breathing heavily a moment ago."

"I suppose you had better," I answered.

Bang! Lucille shot down the stairway.

"Send another shot at him," called out Aunt Ilda's voice.

Bang! went Lucille's second shot down the stairway.

"What's the matter?" cried Beth from her room.

"Why don't you shoot, Alys?" asked Lucille excitedly.

"Shoot out the window, Alys, and let them know you can use the revolver anyway," urged Lucille.

With a blue flash that startled myself, my thirty-eight calibre "Smith and Wesson" thundered on the night air. I had aimed at nothing after all!

Lucille rapidly fired the remainder of her loads,

shooting down as well as possible toward the steps leading to my door where the men had been working, though it was impossible to hit very close to it, and recharged, proud as a peacock of the rapidity with which she could fire and reload.

"Where is he?" broke in Aunt Ilda at our side.

"We heard a crash downstairs and wanted to waken you—we—"

"Fools!" burst forth my aunt; "why, I got out of bed, and forgetting I was not in my own room, bunked against the door in the dark. I hope you will now be contented and go to bed. I shall have you both on my hands with pneumonia." In disgust, she descended the stairs.

We looked sheepishly at each other.

"Alys, hear that poor bird in distress?" said Lucille. "I must have hit a nest—I'm so sorry."

"It can't be helped," I answered; "I'm sorry, too—there's a rooster crowing, and the night is about over."

"I wonder what damage I have done to the house?" said Lucille. "Aunt Ilda will send me home flying to-morrow morning, when she finds plaster over everything—a regular Port Arthur night, isn't it?"

"Go to bed, Lucille; I am going to watch a little longer. I want to see what happens when daylight comes."

She crept off to bed and in a second was breathing heavily.

CHAPTER VII

OUR household had hardly quieted down when I heard the sound of our old, squeaky wheelbarrow. I was too prostrated to sit up and make an attempt to see in the semi-darkness which way they were going with it; and not long after I must have fallen asleep. When I aroused myself the sun was shining.

Distinctly even from the upper window could be seen very broad and unusually large footprints. Previously the prints had been those made by a long, narrow, high-arched foot, bearing most of the weight of the body on the outer side of the foot, and walking with one foot directly ahead of the other. Here were the other man's footprints!

"I'm dreaming now of Hallie, Sweet Hallie, Sweet Hallie," broke most lustily the morning stillness; so early was it that the birds had not ceased talking to one another as they ushered in the day.

"I'm dreaming now of Hallie, Sweet Hallie, Sweet Hallie," yet again was lustily sung!

Lo and behold! Nixon at this hour of the morning came from between the houses, walked down the gully where I had noticed the footprints, stamping as he went, carefully obliterating them and so on to the barn. He had on a pair of trousers, skin tight, exactly the same

shade as those he had on the night before, which were very much too large for him; the outline of his revolver showed very plainly in his right hip pocket.

I had told Aunt Ilda the first morning after examining the footprints that whoever made them had a peculiar walk, one foot overlapping the other; she had answered, "That walk is animal in its instinct."

If that was a sign of having animal instincts, then the animal part of Nixon's nature was strongly developed; it would seem at times as if he must lose his equilibrium.

He no more than reached the barn when he returned—this time stealthily; no singing, no stamping. He crept softly toward the porch leading to my door. Aha! He wanted to examine something. His big sombrero-like straw hat was well down over his eyes, but not far enough to prevent my seeing that he was looking in my direction. I stood up deliberately before the open window so he might see I was watching him, in order to prevent his changing anything that might be there.

I then went downstairs, opened the door and holding my revolver ready for immediate use went out. The look he gave me would have sent cold chills down my back if I had not been only too anxious for the opportunity or excuse to shoot. He shifted his position. I shifted my revolver, keeping it pointed in his direction. Neither one of us offered a word of explanation as to why we were out at that hour of the morning, nor

was there one word in reference to the night's adventure. I went around the house, and as I went kept him well in front of me, giving him no opportunity to get behind me.

It was war, now, to the finish!

* * * * *

"Will you please tell me why Nixon did not come to our assistance last night?" queried Lucille.

"I never expected him to do so," I answered.

"Well, will you also tell me why we do not pack up and leave here when we intend returning to the States in a few days, anyway?" she continued.

"I, for one, Lucille, have no intention spending such another night."

Just then Aunt Ilda entered the room. "You girls are getting entirely too wrought up over this thing," was her first remark.

"Aunt Ilda, I have stood all I am able to stand, I am at the end of my tether," I told her.

"You girls can go in town to-day if you want to, but I am going to remain until next Friday, when I had intended to go. I am not going to change my plans for any such absurd thing as this."

"You know full well, Aunt Ilda, I would not go and leave you here alone," I answered; "that is out of the question."

Much discussion brought about the decision that we would endeavor to secure the aid of the constable or

some other officer from that part of the country ; this was the only concession we could get our aunt to make.

Before breakfast I hunted for the track of a wheelbarrow. Instead of the usual marking a wheelbarrow would make there were two tracks about a foot and a half apart which led up to the house. From there they seemed to go toward the barn, but were lost in that direction, curved around and went back toward the side of the house. I was wondering what could have made such tracks while at breakfast, when I heard the sound of our old wheelbarrow again. I went quickly to the west piazza and saw Martha bringing some wood from the wood pile.

"Martha, your wheelbarrow makes queer tracks. See! There are two tracks instead of one!" I exclaimed.

"It's gettin' so old, Miss Alys ; it's been mended," she replied.

"Miss Alys," suddenly called Nixon, who had come precipitately out of the far kitchen.

"What is it, Nixon?" I asked in a tone of voice steady and under perfect control.

"Nothing," he confusedly muttered.

"Oh, I thought you called me."

He walked on past the house. The old wheelbarrow might solve the mystery.

Shortly after breakfast Lucille, Beth and myself went to the town of Bear River, two miles away, and

there obtained information as to the constable's name and how to reach his house. Unfortunately these directions were as definite as they usually are in the country.

"You go down this road for a mile or two; then up a hill or two; pass a few cabins, then later you will see a house on a hill. That is *not* the house, though *his* house *is* on a hill. Well! you keep to the right every time but once, then you go to the left."

I must say I felt helpless and hopeless.

"Here is luck," continued the man of whom we were making inquiries as a wagon drove up, two small boys being the occupants. "These boys go the greater part of your way. You keep ahead of them so as not to get their dust, and they will keep you in the right road."

Mile after mile we drove and every little while we would come to a cross-road, wait for the lumbering wagon to come within hailing distance. The small boys would call out:

"Right—cha—head."

But which road "right—cha—head" meant was often to me a doubtful quantity. Finally the wagon's way and ours separated. The boys gave us the same directions as the man had done.

"Keep to the right always, except once when you go to the left."

How many times we must go to the right they could not tell us!

"How are we to know when to make that blessed turning to the left?" we asked.

"Why there's an oak tree—you turn there," one small boy answered.

That was a pointer to remember; the boy knew more than we had given him credit for. Oak trees were rare in this country; only one variety of oak did we ever find and that rarely grew to be the proportions of a tree. Up hill and down dale we drove. Once or twice we passed a house. "Keep straight ahead," was the answer to our inquiries. At last our oak tree loomed in the distance at a cross-road.

"Confound it! There are three roads and two of them seem to be going to the left," I exclaimed.

Of course it was our luck to take the wrong road and go fully a mile to reach an empty house. We had to tramp over several fields to find some one to tell us what we knew already, that we must retrace our way to the oak tree and take *the other* road that went to the left. The house on the hill which *was* the constable's was finally reached.

CHAPTER VIII

"I WANT to get in the house without any one, not even one of your servants, knowing I am there," the constable said; "that I consider necessary."

"Do you think it would be better to have more than one person on guard?" I asked.

"No; just let me get in without being seen and it will be all right—"

"Now, John, don't you go take no risks," interrupted the constable's wife.

"I have my suspicions already who it is," he continued.

"I have mine," I answered, "and would be willing to swear out a warrant now, as I consider I have sufficient proof at hand to substantiate my case; but my home folks do not feel any confidence in my ability to do so, and fearing a countersuit for defamation of character, or some such thing, I want you to prove who it is beyond a doubt and arrest him. I have tried to tell you the story of our adventures without suggesting who I consider is implicated in the matter in order that you might have perfect freedom to make out the case from what you see."

"We want you to come unhampered by any of our suspicions or theories," remarked Lucille. "The case

is this—there are prowlers trying their best to enter our house—one night my cousin believes they made an entrance, and we have no men to protect us. Our gardener sleeps in the servants' house and acts as protector to the other servants, who we fear will leave if they are left unprotected. Besides, he has told my aunt he is afraid of a revolver, and has never used one, so he would be useless to us."

"I cannot see why he did not go to your assistance last night," the constable said.

"He claims we were to have called him if we needed him," answered Lucille; "and he waited for us to call him."

"Well—I'll be there by nine o'clock," replied the constable; "be on the watch for me. The carriage will go up the road past the house toward Caney's, and will come back in a moment or two. How will you manage to get me in the house without my being seen?" he asked.

"We will be on the side porch to the east. Aunt Ilda's bedroom has a little porch," I explained; "you know there is a grove of trees that side. The servants will be in the other house at that time."

"Very well," he answered. "I will be on hand and don't you worry; I will bring my shotgun. I have a revolver, but if they ever get a load from that gun of mine I pity them. That's my friend."

"Is there a nearer way home?" I asked.

"Oh, yes," the constable responded; "go through our place in the opposite direction from which you came and through the woods. It's lonesome," he continued, "but it's a straight road. You will come out on the telegraph road and keep on that until you reach the blacksmith's shop; you turn there. Pass a church, then you will soon come to Smith's cove, and you know your way home from there."

We started on our homeward way. Mile after mile we drove through woods along a narrow, winding road. We could not have passed a wagon without considerable difficulty, as the alder bushes were so dense on either side and the road so narrow; but we met none. Not a human habitation did we pass, not a human being did we meet, yet we had been driving several hours. Sometimes on a level, sometimes coming upon a hill so suddenly we would feel we were going to fall over a precipice and would have to go ahead and reconnoitre.

The sun had long passed its meridian. The horse was fagged out. "Will he be able to stand the strain?" Lucille asked.

"He will not go much longer from his appearance," I replied.

"Look at Billy endeavoring to provide himself with a lunch," laughed Beth.

"Billy is hungry, and if the bushes will give him strength he can have all he wants," I answered.

"What are you going to do, Cousin Alys?" asked Beth. "Suppose we have to stay in the woods all night; would you be afraid of Indians or wild beasts?"

"It would be the reverse of a pleasant experience to remain out all night, for many reasons; however, my dear, there are some hours yet before we need worry about the night. We are heading somewhere toward home, I know. We will drive as long as poor old Billy holds out, in the hopes of meeting some one or coming across something which will enable us to locate ourselves.

"What's the matter with Billy, anyway?" Beth asked. "I never knew him to shy before, and every time the sun shines on a stick he cuts up as he did just now."

"I have seen that he is not himself to-day," was my reply.

"He acts as if he had been out all night," remarked Beth.

"Why, Nixon is very good to him," interrupted Lucille.

"He acted when we started as if he had not had any breakfast," Beth insisted.

"Poor fellow, he is having a hard day of it when he did not want to go from the first," I interpolated. "I have been wondering if Nixon has been treating him right lately. Billy seemed to be afraid of him when he spoke very gruffly to him the other day.

Nixon was leading him down to the barn and I heard him speak in a tone of voice I never heard him use before, and Billy shied off to the side of the road. And one day, recently, I had allowed myself an unusually short time to get to the station and thought it was useless to make the attempt, but Nixon claimed he could do it. As we were about to leave our house, Nixon spoke to Billy in the same voice, and Billy never stopped or slackened his pace until we reached our destination. It was a feat Billy had never accomplished before to my knowledge."

"I thought," exclaimed Lucille, "that that was Nixon's best characteristic—his kindness in his treatment of Billy."

"So have we all felt. After our experience with Carter last summer and his cruelty and carelessness, we have been delighted to have some one on the place we could trust to treat Billy humanely."

"There is a buckwheat field," cried Beth; "there must be a house near."

Beth jumped out of the carriage and ran up a somewhat disused road, branching from the one we were on. I followed her slowly, thinking to keep her in sight. There was a house in the distance, but it was like a mirage in the desert. We would reach the top of a hillock to find the road went down and up again before we seemed to make any advancement. We walked fully a half mile, if not more, before reaching

the house, and after a noisy greeting from several dogs and a long wait for some one to come from a distant field, we found this was the road we had to take. It meant retracing our walk to where we had left Lucille and the carriage and then driving over this road for miles.

It was the middle of the afternoon when we saw a man wending his lonely way toward us.

"Can you direct me to Smith's Cove?" I called.

"Hey?" he asked, putting his hand behind his ear.

"Can you direct me to Smith's Cove?" I called much louder.

"Hey—the Smiths—they live out yonder."

Yell as we would at him we never were able to make him understand just what we wanted to know.

Suddenly we reached the apex of a hill, and there was our hill where, behind those trees, our house was hid, we knew. Only one more valley to cross and we were home.

Can you imagine Aunt Ilda's state of mind when we remained away so many hours? She looked ten years older as we at last drove up to the house. It had been one of the hardest days of her life.

Oh, how my heart ached when I looked at her! We were not in harmony over the present aspect of affairs, and my greatest sorrow was her attitude toward me.

Love her? It was the strongest love of my life, and she loved me equally well. Nixon had come between

us. Knowing me to have a highly strung organization, and not being attuned with me, Aunt Ilda now, through his persuasive powers, believed in him to the point that she would rather think my mind was giving way than believe I was correct in my suspicions of him. In those days I sometimes wondered if I *were* losing my mind. But never a sound did I hear at night which the next day I could not verify to some extent, even if the waves of sound were so faint that it did not seem possible for the human ear to respond to them. So long as this was the case, had I not the right to demand full belief in my statements?

CHAPTER IX

EVERY bone and muscle of my body ached as I mounted to what was now Lucille's bedroom and laid myself upon her bed completely exhausted. Captain Caney was putting a lock on the door of the stairway leading to this room. I never heard so much noise made in putting on a lock in all my life.

Amid pounding and other noises I heard Aunt Ilda calling, "Alys, Rose wants to see you before she leaves for Annapolis."

I heard her remark plainly; but to respond to it was impossible. The "subconscious" self had so completely left the material form there was little vitality remaining in the "objective" organs. The connection between seemed almost severed; yet the ego heard the call. The voice of the one I was always watching over and whose every wish I was accustomed to consider was calling me. It was suffering in the extreme to come back to this life. Like one drugged I arose—I hardly knew where I was going. Down the stairs passed Nixon and Captain Caney; I came to Aunt Ilda.

"Why, Alys, I did not know you were asleep or I would not have called you."

I drew my hand across my forehead; I could not answer her.

"Such a thought as your falling asleep when they were making such a noise never entered my head. I am very sorry," continued Aunt Ilda.

I tried to tell her not to worry; it was all right, but it was nothing more than a guttural muttering.

"You go back and I will attend to it," said Aunt Ilda.

I slowly turned and mounted the stairs, sorry to have her attend to the housekeeping, yet unable for the time being to think or to speak.

Later I overheard Captain Caney say, "What is the matter with this lock, anyway—the key won't work."

No answer came.

I heard Aunt Ilda say, "Never mind, captain, it's very late and some other day you can fix it. I ought not to have suggested putting that lock on; it is too large."

"No it isn't," was his reply; "but I never had so much trouble adjusting one in my life."

Now I was awake. An electric shock had gone through me. No more sleep for that day. He was having unusual trouble putting on the lock that was to keep out intruders to my room. This lock was to give me command of the upper or lower floor, as I desired. Nixon was his helper; perhaps something had happened to the lock without Captain Caney's knowledge.

"I will take it off again," I heard the captain say.

A little later I heard him say, "Why there are some shavings in the lock! How did they get there?"

No answer from Nixon; he was a regular sphinx that afternoon! I thought I would get a better position for watching him, and I deliberately took a seat on the stairs in full sight of the proceedings and watched every move of his hands, a covert sneer on my face. Never did he look at me, though I was directly opposite to him—not three feet away. Captain Caney would say, "Hold that screw straight, Nixon, or it will never lock in the world—don't put that screw in that way, we will have more trouble still." When the lock was in working order I took possession of the key.

* * * * *

The hands of the dining-room clock were nearing nine; the other members of our little family were all reading round the table. I had roamed in and out of the dining-room and living-room for some time, restless, watching the clock. I touched Lucille's shoulder at last.

"Come, walk up and down with me on the piazza, won't you?" I asked. Throwing shawls around us and holding our revolvers under them, we went out.

"The constable ought to be here now," I remarked. "I have been watching at the parlor window, but was afraid we would miss him."

"What a gorgeous night it is," I continued.

"But those insects make so much noise I feel like choking them all," Lucille replied.

"There is a whip-poor-will; you seldom hear one around here. They are mournful enough. The insects do not bother me," I answered.

"The monotonous crickets get on my nerves; and listen to that cat-owl, it is surely worse than mournful," said Lucille.

"The cricket makes more noise here than with us in the States, but I have not heard any Katydids and tree toads as we have there."

Lowering her voice, Lucille asked, "Where is Nixon?"

"In the far kitchen," I answered; "he is sitting by the table—way to the side near the door leading into the kitchen, reading the newspaper. He has a fine position for keeping watch over our movements; through the window in the kitchen door he can see whoever goes to the 'old' house, and whenever the door leading into the dining-room is opened he has full view of what is going on in there."

Pointing her revolver in the direction he was from us she suggested, "Supposing I pull the trigger?"

I smiled, "There is a strong impulse within me as well. I am glad we shall get some sleep to-night," I added.

"*They* are like malaria, come worse every other night," she said; "this is their off night."

"I told the constable this morning," was my reply, "that he need not expect many developments to-night, he would have to wait for them until to-morrow night."

"I hear the carriage now," whispered Lucille.

We went as quietly as possible over to the "old" house, going through Aunt Ilda's room to her porch.

Slowly the buggy went up the knoll to the east of the house; we sat on the top step waiting.

"How beautiful the moon is to-night?" I whispered; "but it is on its downward path—it has passed the full."

"How fortunate we have been," remarked Lucille in a low voice, "not to have had a single cloudy night since this trouble began; that would have added insult to injury."

"There's Nixon going to the pump for the drinking water for the night!" Lucille exclaimed.

"They will be back in a moment and he will see the constable come to the house," she whispered excitedly. "I wonder if Nixon suspects something."

"It is earlier than usual for him to get it," I replied.

"He is pumping an everlasting time, I know that," she said.

"They will hear him and will wait," I answered.

He saw us sitting there, we knew. He walked slowly back to the house and I thought what a good opportunity he had for putting a sleeping draught in the

water. Did he think I would drink any of it? He was greatly mistaken if he did.

Lucille pressed my arm and I saw the returning buggy; it came slowly down the road, stopped, and a man got out, his hat so pulled over his face that we went forward very hesitatingly. For a moment we did not recognize the constable. It was he! And the gun held by both hands, as if he were in the act of shooting, gave us confidence. His was the arm of the law; besides, he knew every one for miles around by sight. He would know the marauders at the first glance and he had power to arrest them. Now all was clear sailing, and the end of the mental as well as the physical strain was in sight. We slid into the house, closed the door—we had already shut the other doors and all blinds—and lit the candle. We showed him over that house even to the cellars, which could be reached by a stairway through my room. He decided the upper rooms would give him the best view and best opportunity for action. Lucille left us up there to discuss the programme for the night, saying she "would go over and get Beth, as it was her bedtime."

We had fixed a light lunch for the constable to have during the night; arranged the big chair in Lucille's room, where he could be comfortable, and provided him with a blanket, should the night turn cold toward morning. While I was arranging things he regaled me with various experiences he had had since he had

occupied the position of constable, and informed me that he was deputy-sheriff as well. I began to feel still more confidence and enjoyed in advance the thought of the calm sleep I was to have in a very short time.

"You will have to be pretty alert," I remarked; "they are very stealthy in their movements. You will hear one noise and then no more perhaps for a long time, but if you listen and watch you will find one sound is the outcome of the other."

"Don't worry," he said; "I'm like a cat; even if I fall asleep there would be nothing 'scape me; why," he continued, "young Halman and I were after a nigger sometime back and we started to hunt for him one night. We came up to a cabin; it was all broken down, windows out, doors gone. We heard he was in there. Well, we crept up softly to the cabin, I going ahead. I distinctly heard three people breathing.

"Young Halman came up back of me. 'Say, you ain't going to go in there, are you?' he asked.

" 'Yes, I am,' I said, so I took off my shoes and crept nearer. Yes, there were three breathing heavily. I got to one of the windows and I leaned over, pushed my lantern over the edge quickly with one hand to throw the light in the room and leave me in the dark, at the same time pushing my gun in the room. There were three breathing there. I was right. There were three

pigs sleeping there. I knew there were *three* breathing there."

I caught my breath and looked at him. He was utterly oblivious of any humor in what he had said. He continued intensely interested in his own recital. "Then we went over some fields and we come to a house; I guessed he was in there. Nobody were a-living there then, but I guessed that would be just the place he would be, and I went ahead. Young Halman didn't like a-going in such places, but I were a-going to get that nigger. So I pushed my lantern ahead of me—you know I got a lantern I can make like a dark lantern. I just put that in and looked around, keeping well in the dark myself; no one was there, but some one had been there. You could see where they had left some grub behind them; he must have heard us a-coming and got away—"

"Did you ever catch him?" I asked, slowly enunciating my words.

"Well, no; but then—"

I had heard enough. I began to weaken in my respect for the "arm of the law," as represented by this combination constable and deputy-sheriff. Perhaps our case was different, and he might have better luck this time, I consoled myself by thinking.

"Did you ever hear of a negro by the name of Ed Case?" I asked of him.

"Yes," he answered.

"What does he look like?" I questioned.

"Well," he replied, "he's very much dressed up all the time; quite a nice-looking nigger—tall—why do you ask?"

"I have heard several people speak of him lately—"

"Alys," called Lucille, "Aunt Ilda wants to go to bed."

"Very well, I will come right down," I replied.

"I had better leave before daylight," interposed the constable, "so as not to be seen by the servants."

"You can pass through my room whenever you want to," I answered.

"I will leave my gun here; it will be better for me not to be seen carrying it back and forth," he said.

"Certainly, we will take good care of it. Have you another round of cartridges for your revolver?" I asked.

"No; if they get a couple of shots from this gun there won't be no revolver needed," replied the constable.

"I will feel safer if you will let me give you a round or two—mine is a thirty-eight also, and I have plenty. Good-night, and remember the dropping of a stone is their signal and they work very stealthily."

"Don't worry; I'm like a cat; there's nothing I can't hear," was his reply.

CHAPTER X

IT was well on in the night when the same old sound came of some one undoing the latch of my wire door; a few moments later the usual sound on the roof. How cold I was getting! The night was much colder than those of late had been. Lucille was sleeping soundly at my side. I cocked my revolver and held it ready for action. The constable had told us not to pay any attention to outside noises; it was better to let them enter and catch them in the act.

My! I was cold; the wind was coming in that crack over my head more than usual this night. I slipped over nearer Lucille and fell asleep again. Soon after I was awakened; there was a feeling as if some one were standing above me with a revolver, and I knew it was a negro, for I could feel his presence distinctly. It was "dark as Egypt" in the room, every shutter tightly barred and the dark shades drawn. I smelt powder; it dawned upon me where my antagonist was.

Never before this had I given one moment's thought to a disused attic over Beth's room; any one in there could hear all that went on in my room, and if the room were lighted, could see to some extent also, thus gaining full command of our house without being seen. Their getting into the attic was the sound we had heard

each night. There were two doors into this attic; one leading from the roof over the little piazza between the houses and one directly opposite. No one of the family had been in there for years.

The man must have shut the door of the attic, for it became warmer. A little later I felt the cold, piercing wind again.

This time Lucille awoke, saying, "I'm dreadfully cold, I am having a chill."

"Keep quiet," I whispered, "some one is in the attic over Beth's room."

"What! In the attic!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, the door is open and it makes a strong current in here. Do you mind my getting nearer to you? Suppose we sleep crossways of the bed for the remainder of the night."

She soon dropped off to sleep again. I waited. It was not very long, however, before my skin again became "goose flesh" and the odor of powder came once more.

I wondered if it were their plan to flash the light from the electric bulb in my eyes, at the same time covering me with a revolver, and then force me to have the door opened to the accomplice on the porch. My answer would be: Shoot! He could not intimidate me. I trained my revolver toward where I felt he was. Slowly, oh, so slowly, the night wore on; ever and again came the same cold chill followed by the smell

of powder; then it would grow warmer once more. So wore on the hours till morning.

But where all this time was the "Arm of the Law"?

I had heard him, at long intervals, cross and recross the room. Once or twice I heard him snore, but not for long. It was useless to attempt to inform the constable of the man's whereabouts, for the man could overhear every whisper. Every movement in the whole house was known to him; this was his innings. Lucille awoke again: "Haven't you been asleep?" she asked.

"Not lately," I answered, "but, oh! I am so sleepy, I know I am going to fall asleep; I can't keep awake."

"Well, dear," Lucille replied, "you go to sleep and I'll stay awake and watch."

The constable woke me as he came down the stairs and unbarred our door. One more night over! This was our last Sunday on the old farm. Oh, how I had loved the dear old place!

The morning broke, certainly a most gloriously beautiful day. The air was touched with the first crispness of autumn; the heavy dew of the night before caused the earth to give forth a fresh earthy smell. The leaves of the trees near the house were stirred by a light breeze and seemed to be whispering to each other. The lights and shades were ever changing on distant hills and fields as great flaky clouds passed and repassed over the face of the sun. The tops of the trees in the valley below us made a rich carpet of

different greens, the almost black of the pines forming a strong contrast to the many lighter shades, while the pines that were topped by myriads of cones added an olive green, almost a brown, to the scheme of color. Here and there autumn had announced her coming by painting a maple the exquisite red alone to be found on that tree. The mountain ash, with its great cluster of berries ("Lady Babbie's" Rowan berries), stood out against the green background. The sumach, with its feathery blossom, was also very much in evidence, growing here to the height of eighteen or twenty feet. Everywhere the wild flowers added color and variety to the scene. Buttercups and daisies were the neighbors of goldenrod and asters, or, what Nova Scotians call, Michaelmas daisies. The august flower's golden head nodded on its long graceful stem to a wild rose. Pink yarrow and white yarrow had queen's lace as a neighbor. A joyous scene, indeed, one long to be remembered.

Nowhere on the face of the earth, I believe, is there a climate so quieting to the nerves, so invigorating, yet making you at peace with all humanity. I drank in deep breaths of this wonderful morning air.

But hark! There was a discordant note midst the harmony of birds and leaves—a raincrow—a truly dismal sound.

Rose was in Annapolis, so Martha must needs do more than her share of the household duties. In the old

days Nixon would have done many a little thing for me not usually included in his share of the work. This thought crossed my mind when I wanted some drinking water that morning.

"Martha, is Nixon anywhere around?" I asked.

"He's in the far kitchen, Miss Alys," she answered.

"Oh Nixon," I called; he quickly came to the door. "Don't you want to get me some water from the pump?" I asked.

The glory of the morning had entered my soul and I wanted to be at peace with my fellow-beings.

He came hastily toward me for the pitcher I was holding; but instead of taking it, he laid his hand over mine. I did not look at him, but held the pitcher toward him silently. A second longer, and he took it, but not until he had again laid his hand against mine. A great wave of compassion came over me—was it love and not hate? Was his position so hopeless that nothing was left for him but violent measures? What had I done to cause it? Was it my fault? I shook myself free of this feeling. I must not let it overpower me; my only safeguard was to keep cool-headed and alert.

* * * * *

Nixon went home for the greater part of the day, thus affording me an opportunity to make a thorough examination of the place. I tracked footprints, measured them and noted down all peculiarities. I observed that one man wore rubbers; the left foot having all

markings worn off, but on the right foot some remained at the centre. I found out which tree they used to shield them when training their lantern on the front of the house. They must have oiled the wheelbarrow, for I had not heard it, yet here were its tracks. They had been careful not to have it make two tracks, however, but the width of this single track was the width of the wheel of our barrow!

"What are you' up to?" Lucille called.

"Seeing what I can find out while Nixon is away," I answered. "Come here a minute; see these big foot-prints, well, follow them. The man with the smaller feet has tried to walk in the prints of the big footed fellow, but see, every now and then he makes a false step. It's hard for him to plant his feet as most people do; he walks overlapping his feet."

"Have you taken the measure of these prints?" she inquired.

"Yes," I answered; "they may be useful later."

"Come with me, I want to show you something else," I continued. "This stone foundation underneath my door is ready to fall apart; lots of stones are missing and—put your hand in here—it seems to be worse inside. I have been down in the cellar, and great cracks, the full length of the wall, are there. Of course, the house is in dire need of repair, as you know; for it is a long time since any repairs have been made. All the porches and steps need to be renewed, making it almost

impossible to tell what has been done on purpose and what has been a slow giving way. This door has been the chief point of attack ever since the beginning of their prowlings. You know I told you, I kept smelling powder last night so many times; just here I found what looked like a fuse," pointing to a place in the wall on the side of the "old" house facing on the space between the houses, where it was utterly impossible to be seen by any one in the "old" house itself. "I wonder if they intended blowing open this door?"

"What! Trying to force an entrance?" Lucille exclaimed.

"Yes. If so, he is thwarted once again! I found amongst uncle's papers a memorandum of his having loaned Nixon some money last winter. I wish I could find the letter asking for it. Time is passing, Lucille, and the more the man is balked the more determined he has become until this scheme to get money has taken entire possession of his brain. Mark my words, it is to be success or death to one and all."

"And you think, Alys," remarked Lucille, "that somehow or other that door is to be opened under cover of the night?"

"I certainly do," I replied, "and I am to be carried off. You know how we had to slam the door of Cliff Cottage to get it shut, all summer?"

"Yes," answered Lucille.

"Some one," I continued, "has shaved off the door

to the cottage and oiled it so it can be noiselessly opened and shut. Nixon asked me for the key the other day; he made rather a lame excuse to get it. If I am missing, look for me there; fire the house, should you have trouble getting in. The way Cliff Cottage is built two men could hold it against a number, and the cliff back of it would afford a splendid opportunity to spirit any one away."

"What are you doing, Cousin Alys?" broke in Beth's voice.

"Nothing much, dear, taking a last look round the old place; it's our last Sunday here," was my reply.

"And my last day," in a tone that sounded as if it were her last on earth.

"It cannot be helped, Beth; the carpet in your room has to come up and everything will be so upset for the next few days we must have as small a family as possible." We were using this as an excuse to get her away.

"Well, it's just horrid, anyway," responded Beth, "going to the dirty hot city; I hate it!"

"We shall have some days in Digby before going back to the States," I replied.

CHAPTER XI

A SHOT from a revolver cut the air; a few moments later another shot. They were signalling; this was their method during the hours of daylight. A peaceful day with a restful nap, even if not of great length, had done miracles for both Lucille and myself, and now night was approaching.

While at supper, I saw the flash from the electric bulb; it was evident this was to be a night of activity. Later we heard signalling with the falling stones. To-night they were particularly bold and deadly in earnest. A horror of the morrow had taken possession of me; at no time had I felt the same dread.

"My faith looks up to Thee,
Thou Lamb of Calvary."

Beth and Lucille were singing. I was passing back and forth between the parlor and dining-room, keeping watch of the time, for the constable was due at nine o'clock.

"My faith looks up to *Thee*."

Had I been trusting too much to my faith in palmistry? My hand said I should win by moral courage and presence of mind. If it ever came to a physical contest I should lose, for I had ever been of delicate physique.

I felt *he* was a despicable coward, and as long as I showed no trace of fear nor made a false step, I should win. It was a fight between the animal nature predominating in a man and the psychical portion of her being highly developed in a woman. Should I have trusted more to my Maker and less to my own capabilities? Has He not told us to help ourselves and He will help us? If I had "faith" that I should win, was not that a bulwark in itself? Dr. Hudson defines the word "faith" as: "That emotion of the human soul which consists in the unhesitating acceptance and belief in the absolute verity of a suggestion." And my complete faith acted as a powerful suggestion to the "suggestive entity" to be ever alert and to raise to the plane of my "objective" faculties all that was necessary for the safety of my well being.

Dr. Hudson also tells us "Telepathy in the finite extended to the infinite becomes Omnipresence; Instinct or Intuition becomes Omniscience; Natural Emotions, Infinite Love."

Thus there is a spark of godlike flame in each of us. God is the best in us multiplied by infinity; and the more we cherish that spark, the stronger the fire burns, and more like our Maker, the "Great Creative Intelligence," we become.

"Alys, why don't you sing with them?" asked Aunt Ilda.

How sweet and frail she looked as she lay on the

lounge! Her features if chiselled out of marble would not have looked whiter. Oh, how I loved her!

"And now, O Father, mindful of the love," we sang Canon Bright's hymn, and I wonder if there ever were a prayer more fervently said than when the third verse was sung.

"And then for those, our dearest and our best,
By this prevailing presence we appeal;
Oh, fold them closer to Thy mercies' breast!
Oh, do Thine utmost for their soul's true weal!
And crown Thy gifts with strength to persevere."

Hymn after hymn was sung until I touched Lucille lightly on the shoulder and went out of the room. She followed me; it was now time to watch for the constable. As we passed through the dining-room, Martha came in, looking very crestfallen, followed by Nixon.

"Going to bed so early, Martha?" Lucille asked.

"Yes'm; you'll look after me, Miss Lucille, won't you?"

"Yes, Martha," answered Lucille; "just ring the bell."

"Martha hasn't any faith in my being any protection," I remarked, looking Nixon full in the face and laying my revolver caressingly against my cheek. I continued, "*This* is my best friend; it is cocked now and will remain so until morning."

* * * * *

We sat on the steps outside Aunt Ilda's door waiting for the constable; no carriage had come; the night was still dark though the moon would soon be up. It was gruesome waiting there, and the tension was severe to-night. I put my hand out to Lucille; I felt I must touch something.

"If anything happens to-night, dear, do not forget, keep close to me; they will try to spirit me away in the confusion."

"Do not fear," she answered— "What's that?" interrupting herself.

I caught my breath, a man was stealing towards us; then I gave a sigh of relief as the voice of the constable allayed our fears.

Taking him into the house, we explained the new features in the case. He agreed with us that it would be better for him to hide in the living-room that night; he would then have a greater command over the situation.

After Beth was asleep, we took him to the "new" house. It was hopeless to do anything quietly; his heavy shoes on the porch between the houses seemed to echo on the night air. Try as I would, I could not impress upon Aunt Ilda and the constable the need of doing things quietly. Nixon was in the room above the living-room, and only the thinnest kind of a flooring was between them. The constable left the window that looked toward my door open a little way; through this opening he was to shoot.

Under no circumstances were *we* to shoot, was his command.

"I tell you, very decidedly, if any one tries to enter our room, I shoot," said Lucille.

"Most assuredly," I remarked, "so will I, and, also, I shall not open our door, no matter what noise I hear."

"But you must not shoot outdoors," said the constable.

"All right, but you shoot if you have the ghost of a chance; don't wait for a *better* opportunity."

When Aunt Ilda was in bed and her light out, we softly closed her door; we then selected all the things we most highly valued, and packed them in Lucille's dress-suit case and in a bag of mine. We dressed so that we should be enabled, with only a couple of moments' grace, to go to town, even, if necessary. We barricaded all doors and windows, but raised the curtains in Beth's room; here we stationed ourselves to watch. What a limited range of view we had, though!

Before we had finished our preparations for the night, we heard the signal with the stones; soon after we heard footsteps around the house.

"Hurry," I whispered; "we must get the light out as soon as possible; developments are coming early to-night."

Lucille blew out the candle and we made ourselves as comfortable as possible in chairs. Soon, however, hearing some one in the attic above us and at the same

time between the houses, I crept to the side of Beth's bed. Lucille, in attempting to follow my example, fell over a big pole we had used to barricade the door. Bang! it thundered on the floor—"noise enough to wake the dead!" But no sound from Aunt Ilda or Beth.

How cold we were! We shivered; the door of the attic was open; they were listening, no doubt, to see if all were asleep; well, they had found out somebody was awake when the pole fell.

Slowly the light in our room changed; so deliberate was the handling of the lantern one became fascinated, almost unnerved by waiting for a decided increase of light. It was uncanny!

I crept to the window and tried to see between the wooden shutters. I saw a man walk down the path toward Cliff Cottage.

"They are bold to-night," I whispered. "I just saw a man pass the window; but wait; in a second the constable will have something to say to him with that gun of his." But no sound came from the constable.

A few moments later the dining-room door opened with a bang; there was a wild scuffle on the boards between the houses; we could not see, we could only hear; and we dared not go out.

"What does that mean?" Lucille whispered.

"They have overpowered the constable," I answered. We were cold again; that door was open.

"Lucille, I smell oil, do you?"

"No," she whispered.

"It's machine oil," lowering my voice to a breath.

She drew my head towards her till my lips touched her ear.

"Some one is using machine oil in the attic," I repeated.

Drip—drip—drip, I could hear plainly, and drip—drip—drip came all through the hours of that night.

"Lucille, if they pour oil and water mixed between this room and the main part of the house, this room will give way; it can never stand any strain of that kind. It is only held by the braces Captain Caney put up."

Over and over again the door of the attic would open to chill us to the marrow of our bones, then would come the odor of oil and then the slow drip—drip—drip.

Training Oil, wrote some invisible hand across the wall of my mental vision.

The ego should have written, Train Oil; but it is difficult for the "subconscious" self to rise above the trammels of "objective" rule. It is an imprisoned spirit to be let loose by death into its own realm and to its own fulness of power. No doubt it knows the reading of our palm; for there is some power behind our palms that intensifies the fluid at the date at which we are, so that it forms a perfect dial; and when some danger threatens the "objective" self it often wants to warn us; thus result so many "premonitions," "dreams" and

other happenings which are claimed to be coincident occurrences.

Lucille did not hear the drip—drip; nor did she smell the oil, but I saw and heard everything as plainly as if I had been at the man's elbow assisting him.

"Alys, some one is going downstairs in the cellar."

"Yes, I hear him," I whispered. "He cannot get into my room that way, for the bolt on that stair door is strong."

"What do you suppose he wants down there?" Lucille asked.

"Seeing how the wall is standing the strain," I replied.

Again we heard him on the roof of the little piazza; this time he slipped.

"I heard a queer sound," I remarked a little later. "It sounds as if an augur were boring in plaster."

Some one came to the door of my room, which led to the door of the porch; the wire door was opened. Grasping my revolver more firmly I whispered in Lucille's ear, "If they blow open the door, cover the man to the left; I shoot at whichever comes in at the right; if only one comes, I have the first two shots."

"Remember, Lucille," I added, "if we have to get out of the house, keep hold of me; but if they take me away, bear in mind the cottage and fire it, if necessary, as I told you."

"Cousin Lucille, is that you?" Beth had awakened.

"Beth, dear," whispered Lucille, "I came in to sleep with you. I thought I would be more comfortable in here with you than in Cousin Alys's room. Keep quiet, dear."

A little while after I felt a hand slowly creeping up my arm to my shoulder, and so on to my face.

"Is that you, Cousin Alys?"

What was I to do? The man in the attic must think I was in my room; thus we had planned our night's campaign and thus alone should we have the advantage.

"Speak to her," I breathed to Lucille.

"Beth, be a good girl, dear, and if you hear a noise do not utter a sound; we will watch over you."

"What kind of a noise, Cousin Lucille, a revolver?"

"Yes, dear," whispered Lucille.

The old, massive bolt withstood their efforts to force it. The old walls gave way somewhat under the slow, insidious wedge-like pressure of the liquid poured into the already dangerous gap, but the expected collapse, either of our nerves, through fear of our danger, or of the walls by the pressure, did not come that night. They were balked once more.

CHAPTER XII

It was neither moonlight nor dark lantern that now changed the light—the dawn was breaking.

The dining-room door opened and a man walked across the boards between the houses. I went quickly to the window; the constable passed in full view. Stoop-shouldered, cowed down, a miserable copy of the puffed-up, pompous "Arm of the Law" who was "like a cat" and was equal to any emergency. His gun he must have left in the "new" house.

"There goes the constable," I told Lucille.

"Are you going to see him before he leaves?" she asked.

"Indeed I am not," I answered. "I told him last night that under no circumstances would I open the door for any one or anything. My only safeguard is in keeping cool and allowing no disturbances outside to make me forget my danger."

"But he will not know we want him to-night," she suggested.

"I do not care whether he comes or not, nor what he thinks. He made so much noise going over to the other house last night, no wonder he was found out, for Nixon was in the same house with him and could not

but hear him go in. It was moonlight when he went over from this house into the living-room."

A cough under my window!

"There's the constable signalling to you, Alys."

Another cough.

"I don't care, Lucille, I told him what to expect. I am not going."

"There's the kitchen door opening, Lucille," I exclaimed some few moments later.

Lucille ran to the window. "It's Nixon," she remarked.

Slowly he came out, scrutinizing the ground as he went, but ever watchful of what was around the corner of the house toward which he was walking. He had on the same tight trousers; he followed in the footsteps of the constable, and if I had opened my door to the constable, I should have lost the fight then and there.

I went into my room and softly raised the window. I listened; there was no sound but the three notes that form the call of a thrush and the distant caw, caw of some crows. The light was growing stronger; day was at hand. I opened my shutter as quietly as I could and looked out. Nixon was on his way to the barn. He was studying every inch of the ground; his eyes glancing from side to side. As he went, he placed his feet deliberately here and there, apparently to cover tracks.

I watched and waited until I saw him coming back. I went through Beth's room and went out.

"Lucille," I called, "I was right. Here is the oil dripping from the shed; he slipped and spilt some."

By this time Nixon had reached us. I raised my revolver so it pointed directly toward him.

"You see, some one was using oil, machine oil, such as is used on engines," I said, my voice ringing cold and determined. "I am going to ferret this thing out; we have stood just enough."

He looked quickly this way and that, white as a sheet. "Aha, my young man, you are fearful!" I thought. "I am on your track; arson is not a good crime to be sent up for!"

"They were in the attic," I said, "and either have been preparing the house to fire it or else want to cause the extension to separate from the house."

He stooped down and touched the wet substance. "This is not oil," he said; "it has no smell."

As he raised himself, he shifted to get back of me. I moved, keeping my revolver turned upon him.

"Hasn't it? Well, it's oil all the same; they wanted to blow my door open, but I thwarted them, for I found the fuse and took it out."

"Where was it?" he asked.

"At the corner of the house by my door," I replied.

He started toward it; I followed, still covering him with my revolver. He was getting more and more ner-

vous, his face pale and drawn, his eyes deep set and full of anxiety. I could not but feel a light trace of compassion. He was out of his mind on this one subject; the more he had been thwarted, the more the one thought seemed to have taken possession of his mind, until he was hollow-cheeked, as well as hollow-eyed.

"If there is any powder underneath these stones, any concussion would explode it."

He started as if to knock against the stones, watching intently my face, expecting me to jump back or swerve my revolver. My lip curled. Contempt now held full sway over every portion of my being.

"We can soon tell if this is oil," interrupted Lucille. He turned toward her. "If it is water, it will soon dry, now the sun is coming up, but if it is oil, it will take a long time to dry and will leave a stain."

Nixon's eyes glanced nervously up and down as he turned to go toward the kitchen.

While we were dressing for breakfast we heard the sound of wagon wheels on the gravel in front of the house.

"Here comes Nixon for Beth's trunk," I exclaimed. "Why is he coming for it this early?"

"He said he would take it at seven," answered Lucille.

"Well, it isn't seven by a jugful," I replied.

Lucille hastily locked the trunk in question, while I went out between the houses. I watched him back

the wagon between the two houses until it touched the boards. I had been to the "old farm" almost every summer since childhood, yet I had never seen this feat accomplished before. What axe did he have to grind? It did not take a very astute detective to discover that he desired to obliterate some other tracks. He would be gone the best part of an hour. I would follow those selfsame tracks and see where they led.

He drove away and I watched him from my window. As he neared the barn he drove in behind some bushes, stopped the horse and ran into the barn, coming out with something held under cover of his coat. It was not successfully done, for quickly as he thrust it in the wagon bright new tin reflected the sun's rays! He jumped in and drove off rapidly. It was a tin oil-can, and a new one!

As soon as he was well out of sight I called Lucille. "I am going to track the wheelbarrow. They brought it last night right up to the very house; and see the footprints are very plain this morning. Have you your revolver?"

"Yes, indeed," she answered.

"If you do not mind let us go down to the barn."

We followed the wheelbarrow tracks; they had gone down the driveway, past the barn toward the county road. The man with the smaller feet always tried to walk in the prints of the larger footed man. Midway between the house and barn some gray stuff had been

spilt. I picked it up and kept some of it; it proved to be old cement!

Did this explain the boring sound I had heard, just as if a large augur was going through plaster or cement?

We traced the tracks well out toward the country road, but were afraid to venture too far from the house. Herein lay the weakness of our side; we were afraid to run any risks. We did not *dare* go far from the house.

I persuaded Aunt Ilda to drive over to the station with Beth in order that she and Nixon would both be away from the house at the same time.

I called Rose, who had returned that morning, and asked her to help me with the ladder.

"What are you going to do, Miss Alys?" she asked.

"You bring the ladder here and I'll show you," I replied.

So she brought the ladder. It was old and rickety. We placed it against the house and I tried to mount in order to investigate the attic.

"It's no use, Rose; I'm no good at climbing"—three steps were sufficient for me. "I know I'll land on my head if I keep on," I continued. "Would you be willing to go up in that attic and examine the wall and see what is up there?"

"Certainly, Miss Alys," she answered.

"I am afraid she will fall," objected Lucille.

"You don't know Rose," I remarked; "you ought

to have seen her up the cherry tree; she can climb a tree equal to a boy."

By this time she was on the roof of the piazza.

"The nails of that door are not in very tight, are they?" queried Lucille.

There were no hinges on it; its weight was held in place by three or four nails.

"It did not require much labor to open it," she continued.

"What do you find in there, Rose?" I asked.

"All I see is an old bottle," she answered.

"Let us look at it—that's been there for years from its appearance. Look at the wall, see if it is wet."

"Yes, Miss Alys, it is," she answered. "It's been leaking through from somewhere, I should say."

"Rose, is it water or oil?" I asked.

"It looks like oil, Miss Alys."

"All right, Rose; that is what I wanted to find out."

I went upstairs and examined the roof of the extension; it was perfectly dry.

Rose came through the window into the upper room where I was; I called her attention to the dryness up above and explained to her how I had heard the "prowlers" in the attic the previous night, and had smelt machine oil.

CHAPTER XIII

THERE has been an unwritten law at the farm as long as we have lived there that when the carriage drives up to the house with a guest every one must lay aside book or sewing and go to the carriage to welcome the coming one, and whether the absence has been for half an hour or a year makes no difference. As usual, when we saw the carriage returning we went to meet it. Aunt Ilda had alighted and was giving us the details of Beth's departure when a slight sound caused me to look back. Nixon was getting out of the carriage, for some inexplicable reason, backward. He had slipped, and as I thought twisted his foot under him, as if it were broken or sprained.

I jumped in his direction and was conscious that my face paled.

"Are you hurt?" I exclaimed.

"That's the second time I have done that lately," he said. "Yesterday I slipped on the steps of the piazza."

I looked at him steadily. Was it make believe? Had he hurt himself or had I been a fool again?

Altruistic to a fault as usual! I turned on my heel indignant with myself. Let a person be in pain, and I became his slave, and he knew it. The thought came, however, later in the day when I saw him limp or pre-

tend to limp—had he been hurt in the scuffle of the night previous?

* * * *

"If you have no objection, Aunt Ilda, I will ask Captain Caney to come to-night and watch for us," I said.

Quickly turning, she asked: "Isn't the constable to be here to-night?"

"I do not know and do not care," I answered. "He has proven himself absolutely no good. Last night the prowlers were less afraid of detection and interference than any night yet."

"You cannot tell me there were men around and he did not hear them—your nerves are unstrung."

"Didn't you hear any sounds last night, Aunt Ilda?" asked Lucille.

"Of course I did not," replied Aunt Ilda.

"Well, for one thing," remarked Lucille, "I knocked down that heavy six-foot pole we had against Beth's door, and it made noise enough to rouse a whole neighborhood."

"There was some one in the attic last night," I said, "pouring oil on the partition between the extension and my room. The tell-tale marks I put in various places show that the walls are settling again; they have not done so before this—not since Captain Caney put the braces up. I heard some one go down in the cellar. I saw a man pass by one of Beth's windows, and it was

not the constable, I feel assured. Not one sound from the constable all this time, unless he was drugged or gagged; there is no excuse for him."

"You remember John was told to take no risks," interposed Lucille; "his wife had what I should desire if ever I were to marry—absolute obedience from her husband."

"You say some one was pouring oil in the attic?" questioned Aunt Ilda.

"Yes; I heard a dripping sound last night and smelt machine oil. Rose went up there and examined the wall and found I was right; besides, where the man spilt some it has not entirely dried yet, withal the sun has been shining on it for some time."

"I shall have Nixon stay in this house to-night and will give him one of the revolvers. We shall see what happens," she remarked.

"Nixon stay in this house?" I asked aghast.

"Yes," she answered.

"If Nixon is to stay in this house to-night," I replied coldly, and plainly enunciating each word, "I take the train into town."

"I have said all along you and Lucille could go to town and I would remain here by myself," Aunt Ilda remarked.

"I cannot see why we cannot get ready to close the place to-morrow," Lucille suggested. "I wrote the Terroles we might come then."

"You and Alys can do as you please, but I am not going to leave this house for some drunken man to set on fire as soon as we are out of it."

"You know well enough we have no intention of leaving you alone here, unless you insist upon having Nixon sleep in this house," I said in reply.

"You have a perfectly absurd notion about him."

"We feel differently about him, that is all I can say on the subject. There he is coming from the mail now. We will go to Caney's while the horse is harnessed, if you are willing."

"You can do as you please," Aunt Ilda replied. "Captain Caney offered to come in the beginning and I have all along thought that was the best arrangement."

* * * * *

Caney's farm adjoined ours; in fact, the two farms tongued and grooved into each other, yet it was a fifteen minutes' drive from our house to theirs. The road, rocky and rutty, wound up over the knoll to the east; on through the apple orchard, then on through the woods before touching the Caney farm. Each tree and stone had some bygone happiness clinging to it, recollections of times when the dear old place rang with merry voices—several of them stilled now by the sleep of death. Birch, beech, maple and pine were all dear to me. Would they ever echo laughter to our ears again?

While we waited for Captain Caney to come from the field beyond, we watched Joe, his oldest son, drive a pair of oxen up the road toward the barn. They were hauling a load of straw from which the grain had been threshed. His "gee-haw" guided them slowly but surely over all obstacles. The oxen, groomed and shod as a valuable horse would be, seem gifted with more than the ordinary amount of sense. They would turn a corner in the road just at the proper angle, avoid a rut or stone without ever endangering the equilibrium of their load, and their horns, by which they were harnessed, appeared to have a boundless amount of strength.

Slowly, deliberately Captain Caney walked toward us. Unusually tall and exceedingly thin, loosely jointed, with a full, bushy, unkempt beard and rather long hair, what a contrast he formed to the son we had been watching, with his closely knit, wiry figure, smooth-shaven face and alert action.

"Captain Caney, Aunt Ilda told you the other day when you were over that we have been annoyed by prowlers," I remarked after the usual greetings.

"Haven't they ceased coming?" he asked.

"No; they were bolder than usual last night, though we had the constable staying with us; we want you to come over and help us."

Just then his wife came in sight accompanied by old

Captain Hamlin. "Good-morning, Miss Alys, won't you come in?" she asked.

"No, thank you. We just came over to see your husband about something and only have a moment."

"How are you, Miss Lucille?" she continued, and plied first one of us and then the other with questions about everybody and everything, while our brains were dizzy with the strain under which we had been. Still we had to be patient. We desired to insure secrecy, and the state of affairs must be kept from her as long as possible, for Nixon would see some of them before nightfall, we knew.

"You see, Captain Hamlin's met with an accident," said Mrs. Caney.

"What is the matter with your hand, captain?" asked Lucille.

"Well, if you've got a minute or two to stop, I'll tell you. You know I dream dreams. Do you believe in dreams?" he asked, turning to me.

"Yes," I said; "I have had dreams come true."

"Well," said he, "I had a young colt, a beauty, and I was in the habit of driving her often. And one night I dreamt I was driving into town and I met a young lady, who lives between my home and town, and I was upset and was hurt. I had that colt in the stable for months, but I never drove her after that. Finally I had to go to town, so I got a neighbor to harness his trucking team up and take me to town. On the way

we stopped at that young woman's house, and if I had only gotten out there and walked the rest of the way! But I didn't. When I saw that woman I knew it was coming. Sure enough, we had only gone a little way when the wagon upset, and I was hurt."

Looking down at his injured arm, he continued, speaking rapidly, as if he were afraid we would leave before he could tell us something else.

"I tell you, I believe in dreams. Why, when I was a young man and was on a fishing smack I had a dream—"

Much interest as I might have had in the old seaman's yarns at another time, just then I felt it was imperative to hasten back to the lodge.

Noticing my uneasiness, he remarked: "Your horse will stand, and I want to tell you about a dream I had years ago. Then you won't say there is nothing in dreams."

He was discoursing upon his favorite topic; even Mrs. Caney did not have an opportunity to ply any more of her numerous questions.

"My brother was captain of a fishing schooner and lived with his wife at Cape Cod. One night in a dream I saw his house as plain as if I had known every inch of it, but I had never been there in my life. I saw his wife and his dog. I felt a dread of something that was to come. Then it seemed as if I saw my brother brought in dead. His wife was gray-haired. Not

long after the boat I was on made for Cape Cod, and I went to see my brother soon after we made port. I was struck dumb, for there was the very house that I had seen in my dream, and the very dog I had seen. My brother's wife was not gray-haired though. But I knew trouble was coming. I came home, and it wasn't long after when I heard that my brother's schooner had been caught in a terrific gale and foundered. He and all his crew were lost. Do you wonder I say there's more in dreams than most people think? To be sure it was some time after when my brother's wife turned gray, but her hair is as white as snow these many years."

He started as if to tell another story.

Captain Caney stood with his hand on the wheel, and Mrs. Caney with Captain Hamlin blocked us the other side. My diplomatic power was strained to the utmost.

Picking up the reins as a suggestion to them to move away, I turned the horse in Mrs. Caney's direction, thus forcing her to fall back and allowing a moment's conversation with her husband.

"You will come over and look at those places that need repairing," I said to him.

"Yes, I guess I can," he replied, understanding the hint of secrecy suggested by my question.

Lucille leaned out of the carriage as we started off and motioned with her lips, "Bring your gun with you."

He laughed. "Oh, yes, I'll bring that." Lowering his voice still more, "About what time do you want me?"

"It doesn't make any difference. Any time before ten, but do not let any one know you are coming."

"Come to the porch of Aunt Ilda's room," I whispered, as we drove away amid a perfect rainfall of messages and remarks from the direction of Mrs. Caney, none of which I heard. I was only conscious that she was chattering volubly.

CHAPTER XIV

"How fiendishly dark it is to-night!"

I was standing near one of the windows of the dining-room.

"Isn't it about time to be on the watch for the captain?" asked Lucille, as she joined me.

"Yes; it is almost nine."

"Where are you going to have Captain Caney stay?" inquired Aunt Ilda.

"In Beth's room," answered Lucille. "We will sleep in Alys's room and lock the stair door."

"I will go over and see if he has come," Aunt Ilda said.

It was only a moment later when she returned to tell us that not only the captain was waiting on her porch, but the constable was there also.

"Look out, you had better be careful, we shall be overheard," I remarked, interrupting her.

"Come over and tell them what you desire of them," she said, returning to the "old" house.

"Lucille, I thought Aunt Ilda was going to take matters in her own hands. You know she said this morning she could do it more successfully if she were the one engineering it. I vowed I would not have anything more to do with managing our various guardians.

The door leading to the kitchen opened; Nixon, Martha, and Rose came through the room, said good-night, and went to the stairway leading to their rooms above. As Rose held the stair door open, I saw her hesitate, as if she were going to make some remark. Several times that day I had noticed her make the same movement. She would have liked to have told me something. I felt I knew what it was. Did he want to use her as a foil to get me to open the door at night? She thought better of it and mounted the stairs very slowly.

"You had better go, Alys," Lucille broke in upon my reveries.

"My attempts have failed, Lucille; see what the rest can do."

She went over; I waited on the board platform between the houses.

It was only a few moments when she returned.

"Alys, Aunt Ilda insists upon your going over and telling the men what you want them to do."

The light of a single candle dimly lit the low ceilinged room with its high old-fashioned mantel, and the two little steps leading to the quaint doorway of the little spiral stairs. It made a weird setting for the scene that greeted me as I went up the two steps between the extension and my room. Captain Caney, tall and thin, sitting in a straight-backed chair against the wall, his shot-gun back of him, while the constable

crouched in a big armchair the other side of the room. Aunt Ilda was sitting on the side of my bed between the two. They were discussing the whole affair in the voice of ordinary conversation.

"If you discuss matters here," was my opening remark, "all I can say is, the men will know all your plans. Everything is heard in the attic, and by this time of night there is usually some one there for the purpose of listening."

They never moved!

I could not awaken them to the fact that their method of detective work was on lines to benefit the other party. Aunt Ilda turned to the constable, "Where is your gun?" she asked.

"I had to walk over to-night," he answered, shifting his feet, "and could not bring it with me, but I have my revolver."

I watched him intently; he did not show his revolver.

"Walked over?" I exclaimed; "it's many a long mile to walk."

"There is a shorter way to come than the road you took the other day."

"I should hope so," I answered. "By the way, you have not told us yet why you did not shoot last night."

"I did not hear anything," he replied.

"You did not hear anything! Then you are deaf, that is all I can say!"

"No, I'm not," he objected.

"Were you drugged then?" I queried.

"No; all I heard was a dog between the houses. I came out and sat on the front piazza most of the night," he answered.

"The men didn't try to do things quietly last night; they seemed to be fearless and made an unusual amount of noise. We expected you to shoot—you had made us promise not to shoot unless some one made an entrance to our very room. There is no excuse for you unless you were drugged or gagged; we finally decided that that was what was the matter."

"Oh, no," he repeated; "I was not."

"Then you were asleep?"

"Well, I may have been asleep, but I'm not deaf."

"Where do you want the constable to stay, Alys?" interrupted my aunt.

"The constable can stay in the other house"—he cringed as I said it—"as long as he has had such a long walk; it is out of the question to say *not* to stay, but he cannot stay in this house. Captain Caney will remain with us here to act as our protector. You need not return to-morrow night," I concluded, turning to the constable. "After last night it is very evident you would not be of any use to us."

My voice was harsh and rough. I felt both contempt and sorrow for him, he looked so effectually crushed. I watched him follow Aunt Ilda over to the "new" house. Where was the boastful, eager-for-the-

fray sort of man of the night before? Trying to hide his tall frame behind a little frail woman! Cringing in utter dread, he slunk back of her and entered the dining-room door most reluctantly. I followed them and we locked the house up for the night.

CHAPTER XV

"BRING the big armchair into Beth's room, Lucille, for Captain Caney," Aunt Ilda said; "I hope you girls will go up to bed and sleep. Disabuse your mind of prowlers," was her parting command, as she bade us good-night.

"Shall we put the big log against this door leading on the porch?" Lucille asked of the captain; "you see the lock is of little use."

"No," he replied; "I will put the chair I am going to sit in opposite. You go to sleep and I will watch."

"I have been thinking of what you said, Lucille," I remarked, as we were making our preparations for the night, "about shooting through that crack over the door; I hadn't thought of it before. I wonder if a revolver could be held so as to hit any one up in the attic?"

We had become accustomed to talking in a tone of voice so low it was hardly more than a breath.

Going over to investigate, I looked up. I beckoned Lucille to come and look.

"What is it?" she asked.

"You cannot see any stars now; they have covered the crack in the outside wall to prevent any light com-

ing through." I laid my hand through the crack over the door.

"They have whittled away the beam, made a groove just large enough to hold a revolver. So—that—is the way they were going to manage to train it on me, were they? Well, we continue to sleep with our heads down the other way of the bed, and if you don't mind we will pull the bedstead farther down."

We again packed our most prized belongings and remained dressed ready for any emergency. Finally we went to bed and fell asleep.

* * * * *

"What on earth is that noise?" Lucille whispered.

"It is Captain Caney snoring. I have heard him for some time past and have not known what to do. The man crossed over the roof and I heard him stumble. He is in the attic and the door leading to the porch is unlocked."

"We must wake him up." Lucille coughed, waited a moment, coughed again, but the snore came stronger and louder.

We both burst out laughing. The humor of the affair was too strong for us to resist.

"We certainly have a choice pair of guardians," Lucille remarked.

I slipped out of bed and went to the door and called in a low voice, "Captain Caney"—

No response. I opened the door between the rooms and called again. No response.

He was sitting in the easy chair with his gun between his legs in the deep sleep of a man dead tired from manual labor.

"Captain Caney," I called still louder!

"Hey," he sleepily answered.

"Captain, I am very sorry to have to waken you, but will you lock that door? I cannot sleep when I know it is unlocked."

"Why, no one can come near it without my hearing them, and they are not likely to come in to get a shot from this gun," he replied.

"I cannot sleep with it unlocked," I reiterated.

"He's deafer than I thought," whispered Lucille, when I returned to bed, but not to sleep, for I had lost confidence in him also.

It was not long before snoring resounded through the room again. I had left the door between the rooms open and stood guard myself.

As morning dawned we heard the dining-room door open and the constable, a crestfallen specimen of a man, passed out of the affair. From the bottom of my heart I felt sorry for him. A few moments later we saw Nixon going to the barn. Taking our revolvers, Lucille and I went out between the houses, Captain Caney following. Just as we reached the porch we heard heavy footsteps in the direction of the dining-

room. Nixon was at the barn, we knew, the constable we had seen go. This, then, more than likely was the second man.

"Martha," I called.

"Yas'm," answered her voice from upstairs.

"Where are you and Rose?" I asked.

"Upstairs," came the answer.

As Captain Caney did not make a move to investigate, I turned to him and exclaimed, "Captain Caney, some one is in the other house."

By this time Aunt Ilda had joined us.

"What in the world is the matter?" she asked indignantly.

The captain looked at Aunt Ilda and smiled. Between the exhaustion from his hard day's work and his deafness he had not heard any sound during the night. He had slept long (though I must admit in a very uncomfortable position), and to him it was all an absurdity. He had heard the noise we believed to be a man walking on board floors, and without a plausible explanation of the sound stood there immovable. It took his brain sometime to conceive an idea of action and to transmit the thought to the muscles. His conduct was truly Nova Scotian—non-committal in statement and action.

"Will you go and see?" I asked him.

He went finally. Opened the door deliberately, took a half dozen measured steps in the darkened room

to the door leading to the living-room and returned to where we were standing between the houses.

"There is no one there," he said in a "I knew it" sort of tone, smiling at Aunt Ilda.

"It's the biggest piece of tomfoolery I ever heard of," exclaimed Aunt Ilda. "I am utterly disgusted with you all." Turning to Captain Caney, she asked: "You did not hear any sounds last night, did you?"

"None whatever, except once I heard a dog cross the boards out here. I guess you do not need me any more this morning."

Slowly I retraced my way back to my room. I was heavy hearted. Oh for a man who could think and act quickly and who was brave! A morally and physically courageous man! If we could have caught the assistant, the leader could have been brought to justice most likely. This, then, our greatest opportunity, had been lost from lack of courage and quickness to act. I, too, was included among those that were cowardly. Had I only been brave enough to have entered that room quickly and brought that negro to bay!

I leaned against my window. "What was to be done?" I thought as I gazed toward the country road. Who should pass by but Carter, whistling in his happy-go-lucky way. Barely five in the morning! Carter out at that time—so near here—miles away from his home. I guess I was not far wrong to think it was he in the dining-room, and he must have gone down the path

on the other side of the house back of the kitchen to the county road. Just like him to be brazen and whistle as he passes here!"

"Alys, Aunt Ilda says she is willing for us to get a detective from town," Lucille remarked, as she entered the room.

"I have just been telling Lucille," said Aunt Ilda, "that I am not willing to close the house until we find out who it is that is annoying us. It seems like the work of some stranger to this neighborhood. We have lived here many summers and never have been molested. It is odd to have trouble from any one living around here at this late date. It appears to me to be the work of some drunken man—Indian or negro." Not for a second would Aunt Ilda entertain my solution of the mystery.

"I can go into Digby," I replied, "and see if I can find a detective."

"If we leave now," remarked my aunt, "they will set the house on fire."

"Well, it is insured," said Lucille.

"But there are many things money cannot replace."

"Take those things in town with you and let them burn the rest if they want to."

"I'll take the early train," I said, "and see what I can do. I'll go over now and see about breakfast."

"I will go over in a moment," insisted Aunt Ilda.

"No, I'm ready; I'll go."

Rose was setting the table. I was amazed at the change in her whole bearing. Her face was swollen and her mouth seemed out of shape; a small cut was on one side of her mouth.

"Rose, what is the matter?"

"I don't feel very well."

"Have you a toothache?"

"No'm, I haven't had any lately." Her voice was full of tears and her eyes looked away from mine; "my head aches."

A feeling came over me that she, too, had been intimidated. I had watched her closely of late. Nixon had been gaining an ascendancy over her, I feared.

I went in the kitchen, and Martha, too, was on the verge of crying and acted as if every sound was laden with harm to her. What had come over them?

Breakfast was a dismal failure. Things were forgotten and orders not attended to, and the only excuse given me was, "Miss Alys, I couldn't think of anything." It was surely time to get aid from town!

Before going into town, I went upstairs and examined the roof of the extension, for I had heard the man stumble as he walked across the roof. I obtained several teaspoonsful of the oil. So much had been spilt that it was lying in a little puddle.

CHAPTER XVI

"MR. TERROLE, it is ever so kind of you to offer to go with me. I must confess I should hate to go hunting a detective by myself."

"Miss Alys, I am only too happy to think I can be of any service to you at all. I would willingly come out to-night and guard you."

I had visions of Aunt Ilda's expression should I bring this good friend of Lucille's, but stranger to Aunt Ilda, to the topsy-turvy farm. Lucille had suggested my going to see him immediately upon my arrival in town to seek advice from him.

"No," I replied; "we must ferret out this matter as thoroughly as possible. It is not for this season only, you know, but for the future. We do not want a repetition of this another summer."

"I am dreadfully worried about you and Miss Lucille. Your aunt does not realize the danger she is placing you girls in by remaining in that lonely place under existing circumstances."

"Aunt Ilda at first did not believe that anything out of the ordinary had happened," I remarked. "Now she fears if we leave the place unprotected it will be set on fire. You know she does not accept my version

of the affair. Nixon somehow has enlisted her on his side; he has closed her eyes to any defect in himself."

"Here we are at the Court-House!"

After explaining our case first to one and then to another we found that lower authorities and higher authorities agreed.

"You can have no assistance from the city officers," they said. "It is a case of malicious mischief. No criminal act has been committed. The constable of the county is the one you should apply to."

"We have had him and he was of no use whatsoever," I would answer.

"Then a private detective is what you want."

Mr. Terrole turned to the town clerk who was standing near us. "Do you know of any one you could recommend for such work?"

"Yes," he answered. "Mr. Sly, a very excellent man, is over here from St. John. He can be found in an office not far from here—down this street to the next corner, up one flight of stairs."

A few moments' walk brought us to a quaint old-fashioned frame house. The door stood open; no one was in sight. We climbed the narrow stairs and then meeting some one, asked for Mr. Sly. We were directed to a little office in a back building.

In front of a desk sat a small stoop-shouldered man. He arose and came forward; there was a slight hitch

to one shoulder as he walked. Mr. Terrole asked if he could tell him where to find Mr. Sly.

"I am Mr. Sly," he replied.

Mr. Terrole then told him in a very concise way our errand; the happenings at the farm and that we desired a detective.

I could not but admire Mr. Terrole's ability to say so much in the few words he used, whereas I had consumed so much time in telling the same story at the Court-House.

"You want me to-night, as I understand it?" said Mr. Sly.

"Yes," answered Mr. Terrole.

"I'll have to have an assistant; a thing like this can't be done by one man."

"Very well," I answered; "I am willing to do that; and I think you are right; one man could not cope with the situation out there."

"We'll have to have the money in advance for our tickets."

"I will give you whatever money you require."

"How can we reach the place from the station?" he asked.

"I am very sorry, but there is nothing to do but walk from the station. It would not do for us to send the carriage for you. Unless secrecy is maintained we will never catch this man. The servants go to bed about nine, and after they have retired I will show you

around the place. I had better draw a plan of the houses, which you can have with you and so be familiar with the place."

* * * * *

"You're a nice one," said Lucille, as she greeted me at the station some hours later.

"What have I done?" I asked.

"Why in the world did you suggest Nixon driving over to the station with us this morning? I had a real comfortable drive home! Had to keep my eyes on him every inch of the way."

"My dear, I never thought of his molesting you. I reasoned that he would not have had time to arrange with his accomplice to molest us on our way to the station, as my going in town was so unexpected. We could watch him and it was safer to have him in sight as long as we were armed. I always gamble on the fact of his being an unmitigated coward."

"What do you think! Aunt Ilda had the old attic nailed up!"

"What? The one over Beth's room that the prowler has occupied at night?"

"Right you are. She said she was tired of hearing about some one getting in there and they would not get in hereafter unless they had a good deal of trouble doing it."

"I wish we had persuaded her to have done that some days ago," I replied. "Who nailed it?"

"Nixon."

"That's the 'irony of fate' for sure."

"What success did you have about the detectives?"

Lucille asked.

"First and foremost," I answered, "Mr. Terrole is a trump. He did everything in his power for me. He would have returned here with me if I had allowed him to come."

"I'm glad you didn't," interposed Lucille.

"There are things for and against it," I continued. "I realized that; and as much as I wanted him I feared to do it. There are two detectives coming out this evening; one of them I saw—a Mr. Sly. He was recommended by the town clerk."

"Did you impress upon this man's mind how certain we were the original prowler was in our employ, and how carefully the case must be handled?"

"Yes, indeed I did! I had it distinctly understood," I replied, "that he was engaged to watch this man, and if possible gain some definite knowledge, by means of which we could prosecute him. I never thought I should see the time when my one idea would be to get a human being behind prison bars."

"I am glad we have taken this step; it is what I have wanted done from the first," remarked Lucille.

"Lucille, has Aunt Ilda said anything to you lately about Nixon not coming to our assistance last Friday night when we shot off the revolvers?"

"Yes," answered Lucille; "she says Nixon insists you told him you would 'call if we needed him.'"

"It was a great big falsehood. I never said such a thing."

"And this morning," Lucille continued, "Aunt Ilda said Rose had told her she was in Nixon's room at the time she heard the shots from the revolver—and Nixon was asleep and did not hear them."

"In his room?" I asked.

"Yes; she had gone in there to get something to put in her tooth; she had a toothache."

"Why didn't she tell us this at first? Sounds like an afterthought," I said. "I'm afraid Nixon has intimidated her also."

"We thought we had solved everything when we secured the services of the 'Arm of the Law,' didn't we?" said Lucille.

"We surely did; hope we have better luck with these men."

"Have you decided where the detectives will stay to-night?" she questioned.

"Of course we will let them decide that point after they reach the house to-night. Mr. Sly thought if they had the run of my room and Beth's room, and, as he expressed it, 'one would work indoors and the other out by turns.' I do not know just what he means. We can lock Aunt Ilda's door between the rooms and the stair door."

"But that would cut Aunt Ilda off from us," Lucille exclaimed.

"I know. Still there is no help for it. She would not deign to come upstairs to sleep; it would look as if she really thought there was danger."

"There goes Sarah down the crossroad," said Lucille.

"That is so," I answered; "strange she has not been over to see us lately. We have not needed to have any extra washing done this summer, as our family is small, but she has always been in the habit all these years of coming over to see us every few days. She has a meal with the servants and gets any odds and ends there are to give away."

"She is some relation to Carter, isn't she?" asked Lucille.

"Yes," I replied; "she is his aunt, but a very different somebody from Carter. If there ever was a 'white' negro she is that one."

"She certainly holds herself in a queenly fashion," remarked Lucille.

"I always think of her as a Venus di Milo of the African race."

CHAPTER XVII

I HAD only been home a half hour or so. Aunt Ilda, Lucille and I were on the west piazza watching the sunset. The country seemed so quiet and peaceful! The birds were chattering to one another; a few belated locusts were buzzing near by.

"Jehoshaphat and Dinah!" I exclaimed.

"What's the matter?" asked Lucille.

I did not have to explain—things explained themselves. Coming toward the piazza were two men, one of them Mr. Sly.

Mr. Sly introduced his friend Mr. Solmy.

"Mr. Solmy's come to help me to-night," the former began in a penetrating voice.

"Hush!" I said, in a low voice; "it is not safe to talk here."

I took them into the living-room and said, still in a low tone, "I did not expect you until after dark. I told you the man was on the place and every precaution must be taken to act without his knowledge."

"Just say," answered Mr. Solmy, "we're real estate agents looking at the farm. That you folks are thinking of selling this here place. Say, I've been all sorts of things in my time. I'll be a real estate agent now.

Nice place you have here," raising his voice. "Can we look around?"

"Yes," I answered. "I will take you over to the other house and show it to you; then you can take the road up the knoll to the east and so on through that piece of woodland. You will get a pretty good idea of our location and the character of the land."

When we had reached Beth's room Mr. Sly turned to me and asked, "Have you a revolver?"

"Yes," I answered, looking at him rather wonderingly.

"Well, I will have to borrow it," he remarked.

"I am most assuredly not willing to let you have it," I replied. "Didn't you bring one?"

"Well," he said, "Mr. Solmy has one, but it is necessary for both of us to have one in work like this."

"You cannot have mine, that is certain," I emphatically remarked. "You should have brought a revolver—you knew you would need it."

"He did not have time to get his," interposed Mr. Solmy. "Mine is a bull-nose fellow, no barrel you see, I can carry it in my vest pocket. No one would think you were about to bring out a revolver when you put your hand in your vest like this. I tell you it makes one cold to look down the barrel of a revolver. I have had to do it before now."

"What is yours?" Mr. Sly asked of me.

"It is a thirty-eight," I answered; "but you cannot have it," I reiterated.

"What is the matter, Alys?" broke in Lucille.

"Why, Mr. Sly wants my revolver; you can give him yours if you choose, but he cannot have mine."

"What do you want it for?" asked Mr. Solmy.

"Because that revolver is my best friend; so long as I have it and can keep a cool head I am all right."

"We'll protect you," replied Mr. Solmy.

"I am not willing to be without a revolver, that is all there is to it."

"Alys, you let Mr. Sly have yours, as he thinks yours would be of more service to him than mine would be, and I will let you have mine," suggested Lucille.

For days my courage had held strong under the protection of this piece of cold steel, helped also by knowing that Lucille, too, was protected in like fashion. Now there was but one revolver between the two of us. The little old one that Lucille had brought out from town had the cartridges rusted in it, and was of no use.

"What time do you have supper?" asked Mr. Sly.

Catching my breath involuntarily, "At seven," I answered. "Do you think it wise to be here in such an open manner?" I inquired.

"Where can we stay if we don't stay here?" queried Mr. Sly.

"Don't you worry," said Mr. Solmy; "as I said, you just tell 'em all we're real estate agents. Somebody wants to buy the place. That's easy."

It seemed to us impossible to accomplish what we desired proceeding in this manner, still we concluded it wiser to allow them to work things out their own way, for the present at least.

Horror possessed my soul the moment I entered the dining-room after supper had been announced. Mr. Sly had preceded me by a second. Without waiting to have a place at the table designated for him, he slid—one shoulder way in advance of the other, as usual—into the seat at the foot of the table which was mine, and was already eating.

"Pardon me, Mr. Sly, I will have to ask you to sit here," motioning to a seat at my left. "Mr. Solmy, will you be kind enough to take the seat next Mr. Sly's?"

Before I had settled myself in my place Mr. Sly was busily engaged making a dive here and there for anything and everything there was on the table to eat. I felt some sort of a nervous convulsion inside of me. A nerve ganglion must have become twisted! Never in my life had I witnessed anything to equal this man's table manners. Lucille, who sat at my right, gave me a quick look. I became hysterical. Mr. Solmy was playing pretty to Aunt Ilda and was keeping her occupied listening to some stories. I was just conscious

that he was trying to be agreeable and that he really had a keen sense of humor.

The maid passed the bread; Mr. Sly took his fork, jabbed it into a slice as if he were harpooning a whale. Neither Lucille nor myself could eat a mouthful or say a word, and only heard in a dim, misty way Mr. Solmy telling various past adventures, followed by a loud "Hah! hah!" from Mr. Sly. "That's right! That's right!"

The meal over, Lucille and I went out on the west piazza for a moment to compare notes; we heard the dropping of the stones or beech nuts. Soon after we went outdoors. At regular intervals they fell. The cry of a bird in distress followed.

"That is the signal, no work to-night," I whispered.

"The presence of these men has disarranged their plans," answered Lucille. "It is not going to work having the men seen; we will never learn anything this way," she continued.

"I know it. And did you ever, ever see such a hungry being as Mr. Sly?"

"Never, and with his half soiled linen and wholly soiled hands he is certainly the limit. His friend is the better of the two," continued Lucille. "He tried to cover up some of Mr. Sly's bad manners. He tells a story right well."

"My time was fully occupied trying not to see Mr. Sly's behavior. I did hear Mr. Solmy say some-

thing about going to a hotel, where they gave him a high-faluting menu card," I answered.

"He warn't paying for no lithographic display, he were paying for something to eat," mimicked Lucille. "The remedy in the shape of these men is worse than the disease," she remarked. "Mr. Sly is no doubt a product of the States, blown over here, but Mr. Solmy is an unadulterated Hibernian."

"He is no Irish Canadian, not a mixture, he is wholly Irish; that's sure."

* * * * *

We went to bed early. Aunt Ilda locked herself in her room, while Lucille and I made ourselves as secure as possible in the upper rooms, locking the stair door. I left the window of the living-room that commanded a view of my porch open a few inches to allow any sound to come more readily to us. Then I arranged a chair and other things against, or near, the door opposite this window, so some noise would probably be made if any one opened it during the night. I had seen tracks so often to this door, and as it opened without any sound, ordinarily, we had concluded it was the one the prowler used.

We had gone to bed, but not to sleep.

"Those men," remarked Lucille, referring to the detectives, "make noise enough to awaken the dead."

"What do you suppose they think they are doing?" I inquired.

Bang went a door!

"Keeping themselves awake, I presume," she answered. "Do you suppose any one would venture around here with men running in and out, as they are doing?"

Then came a time when there was silence for a while. During this lull I heard a chair scraping on the floor; I waited, expecting developments.

"What is that?" Lucille asked.

"It sounds deucedly like snoring," I replied.

"Do you suppose the detectives have fallen asleep?" she asked.

"No; they are probably pretending to be asleep."

"It is a pretty good imitation of it, then," Lucille answered.

"I heard that chair I put against the door leading to the porch scrape along the floor a while ago. I think Nixon came out. He knocked against something besides," I remarked.

"I wish they would wake up," Lucille said. "We are not paying them to go to sleep, that is one thing certain. This sort of watching is of no use at all."

"We will have to tell them to-morrow to change their tactics. You have an interview with them in the morning, won't you, and see if you cannot plan in some way to have them here without Nixon knowing anything about it?"

CHAPTER XVIII

DAY finally dawned without any further developments. Breakfast and dinner were repetitions of the meal of the evening before. Stories by Mr. Solmy responded to by the loud "Hah! Hah! That's right," from Mr. Sly. A mild remark or two from Aunt Ilda. A disgusted silence of Lucille. And a brainless, gasping state of mind within myself.

The half soiled linen of the men was now wholly soiled. They were more dishevelled and forlorn than ever. Lucille had had her interview with them and they had consented to pretend they were leaving by one of the afternoon trains; then they were to return between nine and ten, and we were to have a cold supper for them after the servants had all retired. During the day they remained in the little cottage on the edge of the cliff.

About five that afternoon Mr. Sly and Mr. Solmy came leisurely up to the house, announced they were going to the station to catch the next train. They spoke loud enough to be overheard in the kitchen, if any one were listening.

"May I have a glass of water?" asked Mr. Solmy, looking at me meaningly.

"Certainly," I replied.

I went to the door leading to the kitchen. "Rose," I called.

"Yes'm," she answered.

"Will either you or Nixon get a pitcher of fresh drinking water? These gentlemen want a glass of water before they leave."

"Won't they be here for supper?" inquired Rose, in a low voice.

"No," I answered, sinking my voice also. "They are going in this next train."

Nixon, who was standing near, glanced from me to the room beyond where the men were. I closed the door and joined the others in the living-room. When the water was brought the men drank it slowly and then said good-by.

* * * * *

While at supper flash went the light from the electric bulb—the first signal for work. Soon came the signal with the stones. Our plan was working. Immediately after supper Aunt Ilda went over to her room, leaving Lucille and me in the "new" house. She had only been gone a moment or two when she came back.

"The men have returned!"

"What!" asked Lucille, aghast; "at this early hour. What are they thinking of?"

"They are there and demand a newspaper and supper."

"Why, they cannot have supper now," I insisted.

"I told them I would give it to them after the servants went to bed."

"Well," replied Aunt Ilda, "they demand something to eat now. They say they are hungry and want it right away."

"I cannot give it to them now. I have prepared some cold chicken for them, but if I go down in the cellar now the servants will be curious to find out what is going on."

"I think you had better get something right away," replied my aunt. "At any rate, come over and have an interview with the men."

As I entered the room where the detectives were, I remarked, "I thought you were not coming back until after nine o'clock."

"I'm hungry and I want some supper," demanded Mr. Sly gruffly. "If I had known what it meant to take a walk around here I'd never have gone."

"We got lost," explained Mr. Solmy.

"Say, I'm hungry," repeated Mr. Sly, and I want something to eat right off."

"If you had waited to return to the house until the time we had planned," I replied, "I could have given you a fairly comfortable meal. As it is I will go down in the cellar by way of the flight of stairs out of my room and will do the best I can under the circumstances. I am afraid you have frustrated our plans."

I took a candle and went down to the cellar, procured the plateful of cold fried chicken and another plateful of rusks and brought them upstairs. Before I had time to obtain plates, knives or forks, the men fairly dove into the chicken. Cleaning the meat off the bones like animals, they threw the bones on the floor.

Lucille rose in her wrath. She turned on them.

"You pick up every one of those bones immediately," she said; "and don't you throw another one down there. Place them on the plate where they belong."

They looked at her—and obeyed.

"Now don't you do such a thing again while you are in this house," she demanded.

We turned and walked out of the room without speaking to them again or making any pretence to do more for them.

A little while after we were sitting around the table in the dining-room, reading. The door from the kitchen opened suddenly and Nixon rushed in excitedly.

"Did you hear that noise?" he asked.

"What noise?" asked Lucille.

"Why, some one came to the kitchen window and shook the window hard," he answered. "It was a negro. We were all sitting out there and heard it. He went around the house."

Aunt Ilda immediately went out between the houses and Lucille started to follow her. I arose and went

toward the door, touched Lucille on the shoulder, as she was about to go out.

"I think it is wiser to remain just where we are," I said in a low voice.

"What harm does it do if any one *did* shake the window," I continued, addressing Nixon; "it is a fool's trick, that is all."

"The girls are terribly scared," Nixon replied.

"Tell them there is nothing to be scared about in a thing of that kind," I remarked coldly.

We returned to our books and a little later the women servants came through the room on their way to their stairway and said good-night. They were closely followed by Nixon.

We decided that we, too, would go to our rooms, early though it was. The silver was counted, the house locked up for the night; Lucille had started across, and Aunt Ilda was about to put out the light. I was waiting for her when Nixon came into the room suddenly. The stair door opened toward where we were standing, so he had been able to watch us without being seen. He had a glass in his hand and asked Aunt Ilda for a glass of water. It was an unusual request; there was nothing to have prevented his taking it up with him when he went to bed, as he had been the one to bring the water from the well.

I watched him closely, but Aunt Ilda was unsuspecting; she went to the porch between the houses to get

the water. Nixon followed her toward the door. I, too, went toward that door. He took hold of it. I could not go out, I was on the wrong side of that door. Never for a moment did I turn my eyes away from him; my revolver, the one Lucille had loaned me, was ready for action.

Aunt Ilda returned and handed him the glass of water. He drank it in a gulp. "May I have another?" he asked. "It is often very convenient to have it at night," he continued, looking me straight in the eyes with a cold, steely glare. "Good for giving a sleeping potion, if one can't sleep," he said. Aunt Ilda went again to the porch beyond to get the water. Nixon again taking hold of the door, made a move to close it. I took hold of the door quietly but firmly; as I did so I raised my revolver, pointed it at him and looked him squarely in the eyes. He hesitated. His hand—slowly—let go the door, then he stepped backward a few steps, and I walked out of the door into the other house.

"Who is that negro that went up the stairs over in the house you have just come from?" inquired Mr. Solmy, as I entered Beth's room.

"What negro?" I asked.

"I don't know what negro," he answered; "but a negro man went up those stairs in the other house while you were in the dining-room."

So Nixon's accomplice was in the house and ready to assist him. Thank God, I had not lost my nerve and

my revolver had been cocked. I had not been caught unawares.

Mr. Solmy was talking. "I have been watching through this crack in the shutters. You see, opening the shutters slightly this way, and having learned the trick of looking out of the side of my eyes," Mr. Solmy continued, "I can see a good deal—more than one would suppose I was seeing, and I have been on the watch for some time."

On the watch, I thought, but what good was that when he did not go to catch a strange man entering the house after all that had happened. Was he, also, a coward; were all men cowards?

"That young colored girl you have is in league with that man; Nixon, you call him, I believe."

I interrupted him. "It is useless trying to implicate Rose. I feel most positive she is as faithful to me as possible, and I will vouch for her innocence."

"Well, I have seen enough to make me sure she is helping that man. I made inquiries about his family while we were away this afternoon, and, say, they're a mighty good family."

"I am aware of that," I replied.

"Well, he's the one all right."

All this was of little avail. He was apparently afraid to investigate the strange man's presence in the "new" house.

Lucille and I locked the door leading upstairs, packed our valises, put on our room gowns and lay down.

The detectives were in Beth's room; the shutters were bowed, but the windows were wide open. At first we felt some degree of security, as Mr. Solmy would occasionally come into our room and look out of the window, and we knew they were awake.

"What is that?" queried Lucille.

"I do not know for sure. I have been thinking for some little time the detectives were both asleep," I answered.

"If we haven't had a nice lot of men to deal with of late," she remarked.

"I have been wondering if there are any brave men in the world. My estimate of the male gender of the human species has had a severe shock," I replied.

"Haven't you been asleep, Alys?"

"I do not know whether I lost myself at first, but if I did it was only for a moment or two," I answered.

"Just hear those men snore; they are both asleep."

"The worst of it is, Lucille, those windows are open and the prowlers can hear the men snore from outdoors."

"We shall have to awaken them." Lucille immediately commenced to cough and clear her throat. That did not phase the men in the least. The snoring continued. I arose and went to the door and spoke to them, trying to awaken them without letting any one know

what I was trying to do. It was a repetition of the night Captain Caney fell asleep. I at last opened the door and spoke out loud. They jumped up quickly; both had been sound asleep.

"If you men cannot keep awake, then please close those windows," I said very emphatically.

"What can you expect? We were up all last night," gruffly answered Mr. Solmy.

"I have been able to stay awake a good many nights," I replied, as I closed the door between the rooms.

All was quiet again! It was well on in the night. I had been surprised there had not been more disturbance and decided in my own mind the prowlers had discovered the men were there again this night.

Mr. Solmy's sonorous tones began to break the stillness again.

"What was that?" A soft step on the gravel outside.

"Bob—Bob, don't snore so loud," came in a frightened tone from Mr. Sly, as I was about to open the door between the rooms in order to tell the men of the footsteps. He was crouched, rather than sitting, by the window; the most disconsolate looking individual—afraid of his own shadow, you would suppose, from his attitude. If Nixon and his accomplice had known of the lack of courage, both physical and moral, of these men, then this story would never have been written.

CHAPTER XIX

"MR. SLY, it is useless to go on in this way. We have but one night here, and you and Mr. Solmy can take the train to Digby this morning; we shall not need your services any longer."

"We want our money," Mr. Sly demanded of me in a brusque tone.

I looked at him in surprise.

"I have no intention of not paying you," I answered; "we are in the habit of paying our bills."

"Wa-al, I want it now." He was holding my revolver half toward me, as if he were handing it to me. I put out my hand for it, but he quickly drew it back. "I want my money," he reiterated.

I looked at him sharply. So this was his game. He had kept the revolver as a hostage, and I learned afterward he had had a revolver of his own with him all the time.

I paid him his charges, and even then he reluctantly returned my revolver. Mr. Solmy, by far the better man of the two, felt very uncomfortable, I saw, over Mr. Sly's behavior.

"We might have been able to have done more if we had had some sleep yesterday," he remarked, by way of explanation.

"I shall get some one from around here to stay with us to-night, but it is evident it would be of no avail for us to keep you men any longer. The time has passed when there is any hope of bringing the men to justice."

"I'm sorry," said Mr. Solmy; "but I can't keep awake so many nights. You look like a frail woman, but you beat me keeping awake."

"Did you see any one around last night?" I asked him.

"No, only a dog," he replied. "The dog ran around close to the house. He ran in and out just like a dog always does, you know, and ran up your steps."

"A dog?" I questioned; "what kind of a one?"

"A great big one—dark brown one. I waited for a man to follow him. It is an old dodge to send a dog ahead; if he meets any one he will bark; that gives the man warning, then he doesn't follow."

"There are a couple of small dogs that come over here."

"No," he interrupted; "this was a big brown one."

"There is a small black and white one that wanders here from one of the adjacent farms, and a brown and white one. What breed dog was it you saw?"

"I couldn't tell you, but it was not black and white, it was solid brown."

"Mr. Solmy, I would give a good deal if you had shot that dog. That was the man in disguise."

"I was watching for the man," he repeated.

I turned and left the room. It was too late to help it now, but why had not I thought of it before? The old overcoat cut in such a peculiar manner was his disguise. I knew it now, and the dog disguise had also fooled the constable the first night. Why hadn't we destroyed that old overcoat? If we only had!

* * * * *

We explained the men's presence at breakfast by saying they had missed the train, and as they returned lost their way, so had not reached the house until late. Nixon drove them to the train that morning. This gave us an opportunity to go to an attic which was next Nixon's bedroom to investigate. We found a stack of newspapers, which no doubt had been collected for the conflagration he had hoped to have. How often of late we had wondered where the newspapers had gone! Only the night before Nixon had asked for an old newspaper, and there was not one to be found. It was our custom to allow them to remain on the table in the living-room for several days, then to tie them in bundles and place them in the dining-room closet, which was under the servants' stairway. Several times of late we had been at a loss for one. Under no circumstances had we ever put newspapers in this attic. And here everything was topsy-turvy in the attic, and a pile of newspapers at least three feet high stood in the middle of the floor.

Here also were the rubbers worn by the negro! The

size corresponded exactly to the chart I had made from the footprints. The markings of the soles were worn off exactly where the design of the rubber had been effaced in the footprints.

Rose's dress-suit case was packed ready to go. In fact, both girls had their clothes ready to have started at a moment's notice.

We sent over for Captain Caney to come and spend the night with us and to assist us in nailing up the house for the season. We were busily engaged packing when Nixon returned with the mail.

"Alys, Mr. Terroles's sister is dead!" Lucille cried upon opening one of her letters.

"Oh, I'm so sorry!"

"What shall we do now?" she asked. "I ought to go to town immediately, yet I cannot leave you."

"You must go, Lucille. Never mind me; I will come out of this all right." But oh how faint my heart became! No one will ever know what her companionship had been to me!

Though I firmly believed "that by my presence of mind I was to conquer," yet Lucille's love and moral support, as well as the added actual physical strength it gave my side, had been a strong factor in my being able to retain the promised coolness and alertness required. God had given her to me as the needed helper. "Was He going to take that from me?" I thought.

"Under no circumstances will I leave you alone to-

night," she said, speaking most positively. "I shall go to town on the first train to-morrow. You will be compelled, I know, to take the later one."

"Lucille, I hate to have you make this sacrifice for me. I know how much you want to be with those dear friends, and how much help you could be to them in their sorrow."

"I am going to remain with you; that is settled."

Any one who has closed their house for some months knows full well the many duties of the last day. I was supposed to be responsible that everything was attended to properly; but I went around like one dazed and in a dream, thinking only that to-morrow would end my troubles. Revolver in hand whenever I was forced to leave the house, and always armed with an open jack-knife in my waist, I could readily imagine we were living in the time of the early Acadian settlers, when Indians were expected to make an attack on their cabins at any moment.

Much as we loved every stick and stone of the old farm, yet there was nothing further we could do to keep our enemies from destroying the place, except put caretakers in charge, and hope for the best.

In my own heart I still felt I had been right in my solution of the aim of it all. S'Ancrer—to get a footing!

Captain Caney knew Nixon as he did his own son, consequently, if Nixon knew the captain was with us,

he would not take any chances of being recognized as the "prowler." So it did not surprise us that the night passed quietly.

A shot from a revolver at dawn, coming from a piece of woods near the house and answered by one some distance off, made me realize I must still be on the alert. Only a few hours more, for the last morning was here.

"Lucille, you have your revolver with you, of course?" I remarked, as she went toward the carriage.

"Well, rather," she answered, displaying it in a pronounced manner.

Nixon looked at us with a sneer half concealed on his lips.

"I wish your having this ride alone with him could be avoided," I said to Lucille, as Nixon went back to the house for something.

"Do not worry, Alys, he has not had any time to prepare plans. You see, he had no idea I was going over before the rest of you until we sent him to harness the horse, and he had to do that in a very few minutes."

Nixon returned with a bundle. "It is better to take these home now; they may come in handy later," he said, giving me a look full of exultation. They were his clothes, I presume.

CHAPTER XX

HAVE you ever seen one of the Nova Scotian hauling wagons? They are without springs, and hung so low that the body is only a foot or so from the ground.

Laden with trunks, surmounted by Rose and Captain Caney, this wagon I was watching was growing fainter and fainter in the distance, as it wended its way to Smith's Cove this morning—our last morning at Brier Lodge. If I had not been ashamed of my cowardice I should have taken Rose's place and left her to assist at the final duties of closing.

I stood at the door of my room and gave one glance around before I slid the bolt for the last time. Coming up the road was a negro. He stopped at the barn. Nixon came out, and behind the bushes at the barnyard gate they had a conference. I waited—they were like ostriches—because they could not see, they thought themselves unseen. After a while the man came toward the house; I was standing in full view; I wanted a good look at him. Captain Caney's description of Ed Case came to my mind. Here was Ed Case, I felt sure. Somehow my attention was attracted to his feet—large was no name for them. I thought of the size of the big, broad footprints I had noticed,

and the rubbers. Here were the feet that wore those rubbers.

My heart stood still. Had Nixon two accomplices? or had Carter proved inefficient and had he secured the services of this man in Carter's place? This was a different proposition. The fear of Carter, the frivolous, was one thing; the dread of what this man could be capable of was another thing. I stood my ground and watched him out of sight; he went over the knoll to the east.

* * * * *

"Are the windows all nailed in the servants' room?" asked Aunt Ilda, as we were taking a last look around the dining-room.

"Yes," I answered. "Nixon told me he had been upstairs and had nailed both windows."

"Everything is ready then," Aunt Ilda remarked, as she went to see if the carriage was waiting.

"Miss Alys," said Martha, coming from the kitchen, "you go upstairs and you'll see the windows ain't nailed."

"Nixon told me he did it himself, Martha," I replied.

Just then Nixon entered the room.

"You nailed the windows upstairs, didn't you, Nixon?" I asked.

"Yes'm, I did," he answered.

"You nailed 'em, but you went up and undone 'em."

What a look he gave Martha!

"Of course I nailed them up—she doesn't know what she is talking about."

Martha muttered something; Nixon gave her another look, then he pushed aside a chair indignantly and went upstairs with a much annoyed manner.

"You'd better look when he comes down. He fastened 'em, but he went back and undid 'em."

"Nixon, it is time we were off," called Aunt Ilda. "You had better bring the horse up right away."

I nodded an "all right" to Martha, as I heard Nixon come downstairs.

As soon as he left I took the hammer and nails and rushed upstairs to find Martha's story correct. Both windows were undone and an easy access could be had through the back window. Why, the front window was not nailed I do not know. I heard Captain Caney's voice downstairs; he had returned from the station.

"I have just found the door of the far kitchen unlocked," remarked the captain, as I entered the dining-room. "I had been told it was all locked up, and would not have looked in there except by accident."

"Nixon told me it was all locked, so I did not go in," I replied. I began to realize how little I had personally overseen the "locking up" process. I could not help it; I was handicapped too greatly by forever being on guard.

"You know, captain, Sarah and William are going

to live in the little cottage overlooking the cliff this winter, and you are coming over every day to oversee the place, aren't you?"

"Yes," he answered; "I will do the best I can."

"The carriage is coming," called Aunt Ilda. As I came out she asked in a low tone, "Have you your revolver?"

"Indeed I have," I said. "I have it under this handkerchief. It's an old device, you know."

"Will you do me a favor?" I asked. "If I get in first do not think it queer or question it."

I knew just as well as if I had read Nixon's mind before he performed the action what he was going to do.

He drove up directly opposite the usual way! Ordinarily I would have assisted my aunt into the carriage first, which would have placed her directly behind him. This was what he had expected.

"Good-by, Sarah," I said, as I turned to the carriage.

"Good-by, Miss Alys," she answered in a most lachrymose tone of voice. "I hope I will see you again some time."

I smiled at her. "Never fear, I'm not going to die just yet, and I'll come back."

"I hope nothing will happen to you, Miss Alys," she said most mournfully.

"Look here, Sarah," getting rather stern; "I can take

care of myself; see this?" I asked, displaying my revolver. "Somebody else may get shot, but I guess I will live longer than some other people may."

I bethought me of Martha—what had become of her?"

"Martha," I called; "we are going."

Out from behind a tree came Martha, scared stiff. Her one lone moment of courage had reacted, and she was more afraid than ever.

"Come on, Martha," I said; "what are you afraid of?"

"Oh, Miss Alys, will you take care of me?"

Cackle, cackle went a chicken.

I looked at her more closely and burst out laughing.

Martha, dressed in clothes of ancient date, topped by a hat fashioned many seasons before with a little piece of ribbon and a stray faded flower as decoration, stood there cringing with fear. Her braids were unloosened and formed a black halo of wool around her face. A slat basket full of vegetables and fruits—a veritable Noah's Ark of the Vegetable Kingdom—was held in one hand, while in the other she carried a covered basket, the head of a chicken protruding between cover and basket.

Poor Martha!

"Come, Martha," I said once more; "there is nothing to be afraid of in broad daylight."

"You'll take care of me, Miss Alys?" she asked

again, as she most reluctantly came forward and took her seat next to Nixon.

Aunt Ilda waited while I took the seat directly behind Nixon. He gave me a quick, searching glance as I entered the carriage.

For the first few miles he kept up a continuous stream of conversation with Aunt Ilda, never allowing a lull to occur. I watched his every move. There was an exultation in his manner which boded no good to me.

The beauties of this magnificent drive we were taking were lost for me this day. I dared not even look at the hills and valleys with the ever-changing lights and shades of a day like this playing upon them. The wild flowers that I loved so dearly, glorious now in their rich coloring and great profusion, were passed by without a single glance of farewell. I had only time and thought for this man in front of me. He had grown thinner and paler day by day. His face was drawn and haggard. With the whole intensity of my being, I watched that right hand of his. If it went back of him, then I meant to shoot, and he knew it. It was to be a case of "Hands up;" and I was going to be the one to say it first.

We were nearing Nixon's old home; extra alertness and care were needed now. Time and again he would turn to Aunt Ilda, drawing her attention to this, that or the other thing. Never once did I swerve from my

purpose. I never allowed my attention to be called off. I was there to watch and I did.

We turned the corner, passed his old home and now reached the stretch of lonely woods. Gruesome, and full of lurking shadows seemed the thicket as we drove along. Was I dreaming? Was I conjuring up people or was that a horseman at the foot of this hill? He seemed to be resting and looking toward the thicket.

"Isn't that Joe Caney down below there?" Aunt Ilda asked.

Nixon turned quickly.

The seething cauldron of conversation was quenched. The fire under it had gone out.

"Isn't that Joe Caney talking to some one?" remarked Aunt Ilda.

"Yes," Nixon muttered under his breath. He had suddenly become as quiet as before he had been garrulous.

"What is he doing there?" she asked.

"Talking to some one," he remarked, bringing his words out with an effort.

"But I do not see any one else."

"I guess they are back of the bushes."

"*They*," I thought.

It was but a matter of a moment or two when we were abreast of them. And I thanked Our Heavenly Father most fervently for the presence of a friend on a faster horse than ours as I passed by that band of

negroes waiting there in the bushes. A word from this man at our side as a signal, what then— A shudder passed over me as I realized the closeness of this last escape.

Not one word more did Nixon say as he drove the remaining distance to the station. Aunt Ilda gave him some directions about Billy, whom he was to drive into Digby.

I felt as if I were in a dream. I was dimly conscious of entering the train, but later the shrill whistle of the engine half roused me as we went through Digby. The quaint houses, with their high-peaked roofs surrounded by bright colored flowers, passed as if I saw them in a mirage.

"Free ride to the Pines." "The Pines Hotel." "This way to the Manhattan." The buckboard drivers were yelling their usual calls. The train had stopped. Then I awakened to my surroundings.

Here I was "armed to the teeth"—a loaded revolver in my hand on the half-cock; an open jack-knife in my waist; a stiletto and another loaded revolver in my satchel. An irrepressible smile crossed my lips as I asked the question of myself—

If I should stub my toe what would be the consequence?

* * * *

The door bell rang that afternoon and I heard Nixon's voice asking for my aunt. In a moment

Aunt Ilda went to receive the various baskets of fruit and packages Nixon had brought into town in the carriage.

"May I wash my face and hands?" I heard him ask. "I am going to call on my married sister and the roads were very dusty."

"Certainly," Aunt Ilda replied.

As he came up the stairs I could hear him trying each step, for they creaked most fearfully. The seventh one was the worst," I noticed.

"Where is Miss Alys?" he asked.

"She is lying down in that room," I heard her answer.

"Where do these stairs lead to?" was his next query, indicating no doubt the back stairs.

"They go down to the dining-room; that is the servants' stairway."

It was but a few moments when they went down the stairs again; this time he tried each step more carefully. The seventh from the bottom repeated its woe-ful creak.

Away had flown sleep once more.

CHAPTER XXI

It was a gray day; the clouds hung heavy. Only in the east was there a patch of light. Looking toward the head of Annapolis Basin, Goat Island stood out against a mist which had caught some sunlight that streamed through the higher and lower strata of clouds. The "Flying Bluenose" gave its shrill whistle as it turned the bend in front of the house where we were staying. Great black and gray clouds of smoke were being belched forth from its engine and were being driven down upon us by the northeast wind. As I looked through it to the golden light beyond the thought came—"From darkness into light. Heaviness and weariness of heart now; hope and brightness beyond."

"Alys, Martha came over to the Terroles to see me this morning," remarked Lucille, as she entered my room, "and says most emphatically that Rose has been in league with Nixon all along. She was too much afraid of him to tell us before. Rose is completely in Nixon's power from her story."

"My dear," I replied, "don't you know Rose and Martha never were friends; and Martha was always only too glad to find some fault in Rose because I liked her so much?"

"Well, Alys, do not be blind. Here is Rose in the same house with you. She has every opportunity to know your movements. Martha says we have only to ask Sarah about it, and that Sarah felt so keenly the actions between Rose and Nixon she was unwilling to countenance them, though afraid to tell you. This is the reason she has not been over to the Lodge of late."

"I may be blind, Lucille, but Rose has seemed so devoted to me, and always willing to do anything she could for me, it would seem doubly heartless in her to be treacherous to me."

"It has been a great disappointment to me not to be able to bring the perpetrators of our persecutions to justice," said Lucille.

"Yes, it is to me, but all hope of that is over, for there is only one night more. God's sunlight (or plain daylight) to-morrow morning will scatter the fogs of life for me, I know it. By the way, look at the Gap!"

A great white cloud came pouring in through the Gap and over the tops of the mountains, coming like an enormous sea monster to envelop hills, towns, water, everything. It made me feel as if I were off the Newfoundland banks.

"Is it not a strange sight?" queried Lucille.

"Indeed it is," I replied.

"Why, there is Sarah's voice now!" exclaimed Lucille.

"Go down, Lucille, and make some excuse to get her up here alone with us."

It was but a moment or two when they both returned.

"Is anything the matter, Sarah?" I questioned.

"Miss Alys, I thought you ought to know before you left Digby that some one entered the 'old' house last night."

"They did!" we exclaimed in one breath. "Anything taken?"

"No, but the side wall of the extension had been whitewashed fresh; for it was damp yet when I went in there."

I laughed. "That explains matters, Sarah. It is not necessary to think hard for the reason. The other night the prowlers poured oil between the house and extension—the idea was good as far as it went. The wall did give way somewhat, but not enough to accomplish their purpose. But the oil gradually dripped through and stained the wall. Nixon is trying to hide evidence against him."

"Sarah," asked Lucille, "Martha insists that Rose is Nixon's assistant in all this; is it so?"

"Yas'm, she is surely," answered Sarah; "I told 'em I would tell you folks. Nixon will do everything Rose asks him to do."

"You think," I asked, "that Rose is the one at the bottom of all this and Nixon is only her tool?"

"Yas'm, she kin turn him around her little finger."

"I tell you," I exclaimed, "you are all wrong. Nixon may be using her to gain his own ends, but that man wants money. They were positively in want last year, I know. He is going to get it by crooked means if it is not forthcoming honestly. Now, Sarah, Carter is in this; and the fact of their oiling the house and our finding the newspapers and other things ready for a conflagration would make it possible for me to have them sent up for arson before they knew it, and I would do it if it were not for Aunt Ilda. Arson is next to murder in our country. I do not know what it is here."

Sarah's face changed; it grew ashy pale. I had forgotten that Carter was her nephew. I was chagrined at my own stupidity. I had closed this avenue of information. It was only a moment or two before she left, and never another sound did she utter except good-by.

"Wasn't that stupid of me, Lucille? Did you ever see any one get carried away by impulse as I am?"

"It was not a particularly bright move on your part, Alys," was her reply. "You are going out to-night," she continued; "be careful, for when I went down to get Sarah, I happened to overhear Rose asking for a night-key and I know she obtained one."

"You may be sure I will take good care."

* * * * *

A heavy fog hung over everything; the mist defied

an umbrella, wetting one through and through. Several of us returned together, and our laughter and repartee had dispelled all thoughts of the past few weeks. Some of our friends stopped in my room for a few last words before saying good-night.

At the first mention of good-night a cold chill struck me; the room seemed so extremely large, with its high ceiling and vast dimensions, the light from the one lone lamp barely lighting the farthest corners. The girls would have laughed at my fears if I had asked any one of them to stay with me during the night, here in the city with a bolt and lock besides on my door. The tall French windows leading to the balcony, which stretched across the width of the house, would be open, as the night was warm, even if it were damp; but the wooden blinds had big bolts on them.

I made an excuse to enter the closet before the others left me alone, and took note that everything in the room was as it had been when I went away in the afternoon. Before I closed the door, after the last good-night was said, I again looked all around the room; locked the closet door, even looked up the chimney of the open fireplace, disgusted with myself for my timidity. I had ever before me the thought, "Rose has a night-key!"

The hours wore on; I could not sleep; I listened for I knew not what. My revolver was cocked, because I had a horror and dread of that night.

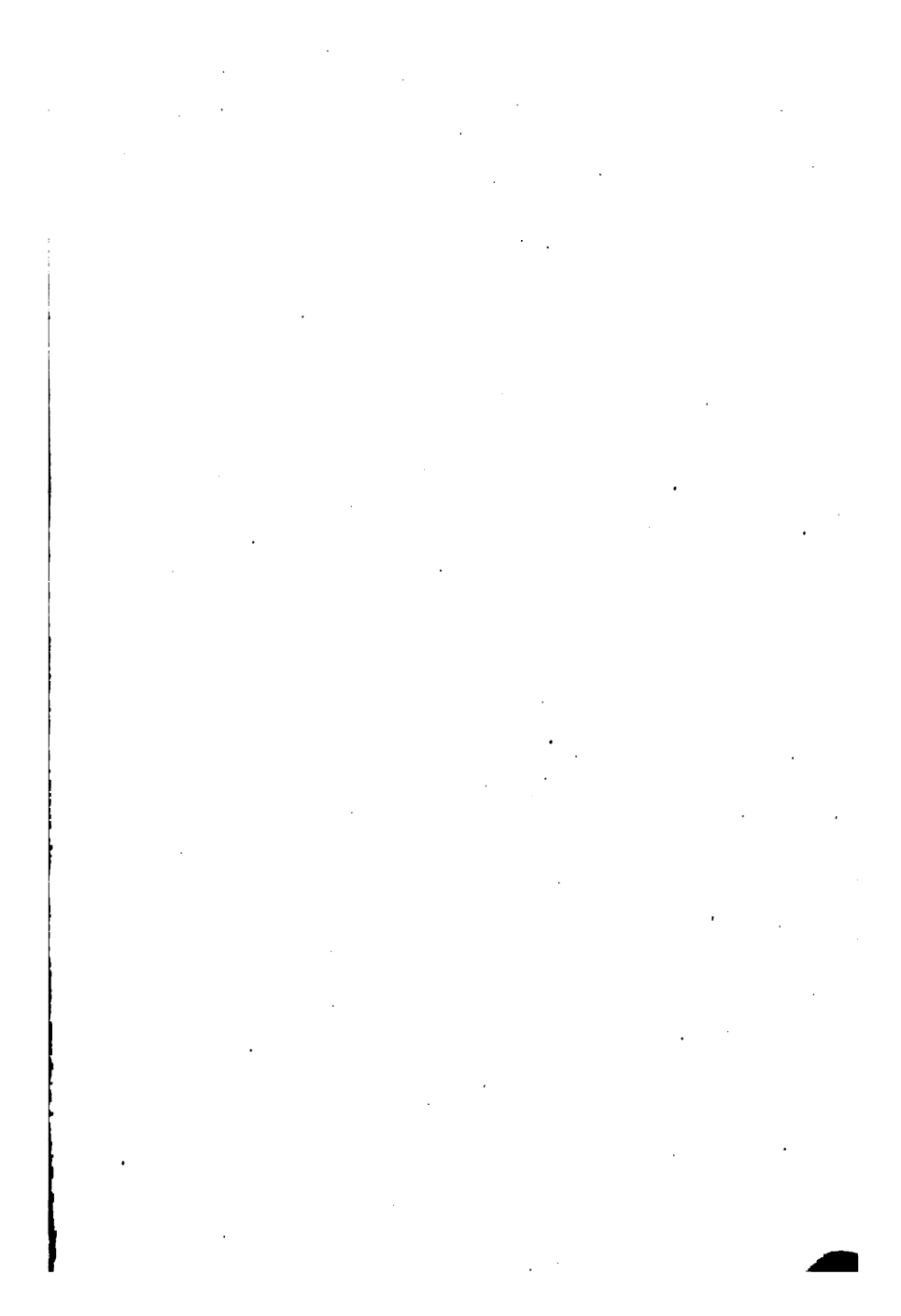
Hark! Through the stillness of the night came the tinkling of the bell at the alley gate; for the grounds were enclosed, and facing on the narrow street or lane back of us was a gate—the entrance to the barn. I listened to hear what came next. A soft footfall was going down the stairs.

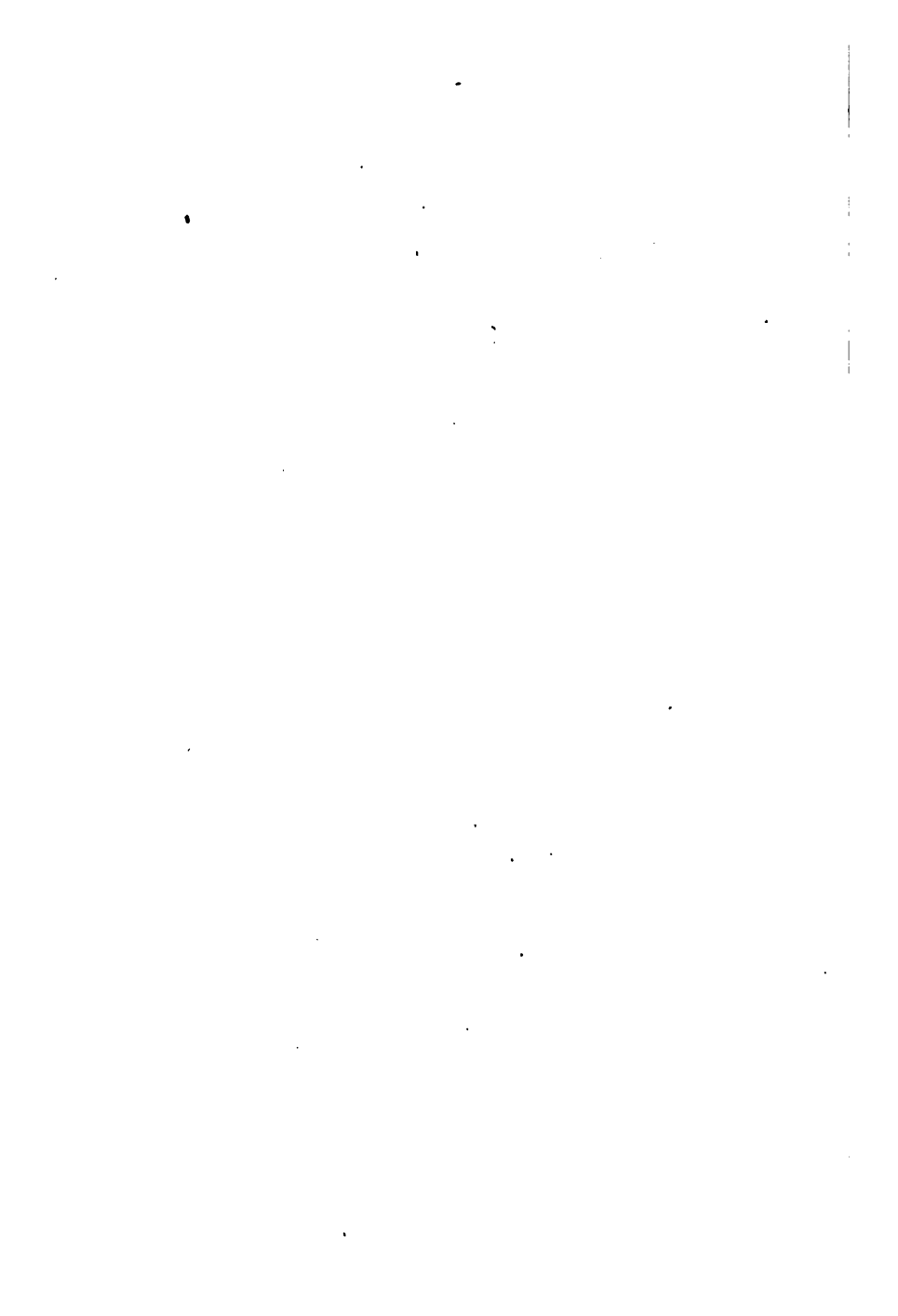
I sat up in bed, my revolver grasped lovingly to me, yet all the time ashamed of my fears. What could harm me, locked in as I was? The waves were beating against the rocks; "the tide had turned," I thought; "at the next incoming tide, I shall have said good-by to my friends and shall be aboard the Prince Rupert bound for St. John."

Creak went the stairs. I counted, one, two and so on, but when there should have been a seventh and loudest creak there was a hesitancy and there was one step short of the whole stairway. My heart stood still. Through the barred blinds came a flash of light—the same electric bulb in use. I raised my revolver and waited. Surely he could not pry back that bolt. Again there was a flash; there was no sound—the bolt had been oiled. Slowly, oh so slowly, the shutter opened; against the light of outdoors stood the figure of a man.

At last had come the shot I had been looking for—my revolver flashed its blue streak across the room and did its deadly work. Nixon Talcott had paid the penalty of his madness!

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